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The Anastenaria ritual performance in relation to witnessing and elements of stage practice

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THE ANASTENARIA RITUAL PERFORMANCE
IN RELATION TO WITNESSING AND
ELEMENTS OF STAGE PRACTICE

Ioli Andreadi

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King's College London

October 2013

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Preface

The question that this thesis engages with is under what circumstances and through which lens(es) the Anastenaria in Langadas, Greece, can be considered as a ritual performance which survives despite signs of elimination. This question is examined through: 1) theatrical reflection and practice, in dialogue with an investigation of the ecstatic dimension of the Anastenaria – Part A – and 2) the investigation of changing ritualistic practices in their relation to the forgotten and the dynamic method of a ‘co-performer witness’ – Part B.

This thesis draws upon the Anastenaria as observed in Langadas in May 2009, 2010 and 2011. It will contribute to the existing bibliography on the Anastenaria in the following ways. First, the Anastenaria, qualified as a ritual performance, is understood as dynamic, including not only practices that are repeated, but also others that disappear and re-emerge.

Second, the ethnographic model of what Dwight Conquergood called ‘the co-performer/witness’ is deployed in order to reflect upon a ritual performance of return. My returns to the field involved entering into a dialogue with the community of the Anastenarides through participation. In following the particular strand of performance studies that focuses on ritual performance, a new way of engaging with the Anastenaria is suggested, through the provision of a flexible methodological tool for its understanding each time. Visiting Langadas more than once and interviewing the same people, enabled me not only to respond “in the moment” with the Anastenarides, but also to challenge my own observations on a phenomenon that is repetitive and changing.

Third, the Anastenaria is related to theatrical performance through an exploration of its ecstatic dimension. Such exploration is based upon certain

observations that can offer a better understanding of the relation between inspiration, consciousness and technique. Such a stance enables the thinker/practitioner to shed new light on specific performative aspects of the ritual (such as the lyrics of the songs) and re-think the relationship between witnessing the ritual and performing for the stage.

This route to understanding shares something with a Performance Studies tradition of ethnographic interest, while reasserting the dialogue with stage practice. There are some understandable caveats one might bring to such an ambition but establishing the following principles serves as a framework for discussion. Theories emphasizing theatre's ritualistic origin, and theatrical avant-garde claims that a 'return' to the ritual would reinvigorate the stage have received considerable criticism. However, the extensive amount of studies that have co-examined ritual and theatre, together with my field work, led me to the conclusion that the two are distinct yet kin forms. This particular ritual has a potential for reading across to stage work in which I am involved and academically engaged. It was through the above lenses that survival (of the participant, of the community, of the ritual performance itself) was sought. In the Introduction I present the aim of my research and discuss the basic concepts. I begin with a survey of recent approaches to the Anastenaria, containing three main points of disagreement. The first point of disagreement can be traced in the attempts to address the association of firewalking with the participants' belief in saints and supernatural power. The second point of disagreement stems from the use of first-hand as opposed to secondhand information when witnessing. The third point of disagreement concerns the discourse which has been called the "search for continuities in Greek culture."

Through them the three starting points of this thesis are triggered. The first starting point consists in an investigation of the relation of the Anastenaria to an ecstatic state and performance aspects for the stage. The second starting point examines the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria. The third starting point consists in understanding the Anastenaria as a ritual performance of return (meaning: repetitions within the Anastenaria, in that sense returns from one year to the next, but also from one day to the next as well as within the same day and within the same practice; and the researcher's return to the field, who is thus becoming part of a chain of witnesses).

The first starting point will be developed in Part A: Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Two is based on observations made in Langadas in May 2009. It consists in an introductory description of the Anastenaria ritual performance. The reader is introduced for the first time to the location, the participants and the Anastenaria practices. The term 'ecstasy' is approached here on the basis of specific observations that were made in the field and have to do with the body of the participant and her/his actions in the frame of a more or less precise sequence of ritualistic practices. Through such observations I define a specific Anastenaria technique that leads to an ecstatic state.

Chapter Three makes use of the examples of a ritual practice to question some stage assumptions. I maintain that what we may call an ecstatic state on stage does not mean abandonment to the irrational but rather a reinforcement of consciousness and control, through a methodology rooted in ritualistic and theatrical theory and experience and through the introduction of the 'fiery actor' metaphor, therefore entering a dialogue with the realm of the 'non-verifiable'.

The second and the third point will be investigated in Part B: Chapters Four, Five and Six. Part Two asks the question: in what ways the survival of this ritual can be detected with the help of the methodology of the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria, which, as argued, consists in a ritual performance of return. In these three chapters I deploy a critical framework based on Esposito, Benjamin and Stengers's eliminated practices in order to enter a dialogue with three narratives. These narratives include the story of attending the Anastenaria as a first-time co-performer witness in May 2009, then returning in May 2010 and taking part in a community of witnesses in May 2011.

Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter, which includes a synthetic summing up of what has been argued in the thesis and what the work's broader implications and contributions to existing knowledge are.

Short Introduction to the Anastenaria

The Anastenaria in Northern Greece takes place in Langadas near Thessaloniki, Saint Helen and Kerkini in Serres, Mavrolefki in Drama and Meliki in Imathia from the 20th until the 23rd of May, around the day of the celebration of Saint Constantine and Saint Helen (21st of May), and also around the day of the celebration of St. Panteleimon (27th of July), and from the 18th until the 21st of January, around the day of the celebration of St. Athanasios (18th of January). Under the name Nestinarstvo it also takes place in the Bulgarian villages Kosti, Balgari, Gramatikovo, Silvarovo, Kondolovo and Brodilovo.

Both the Greek and the Bulgarian versions originate from Kosti and its nearby villages. These are situated in former Eastern Thrace, now southeastern Bulgaria. Today Kosti is part of the municipality of Tsarevo, in the province of Burgas. It is located on the banks of the Veleka River in the Strandzha mountains, near the port of Burgas. The Greek inhabitants of the area migrated to Western Thrace between 1912 (the Balkan Wars) and 1923 (the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey). The Anastenaria belongs to a broad category of rituals that include firewalking and take place in Greece, Bulgaria, South Asia, Bali, South Africa, Japan, Polynesia and other places all over the world.

Summary of the Anastenaria Practices

Langadas, May 2009, May 2010 and May 2011

During the evening of the 20th of May, the participants gather and dance inside the *konaki* accompanied by live music. The dance is repeated several times. There are breaks between the dances. On the morning of the 21st of May, the Anastenarides gather again at the *konaki*. They then walk together to another house to get an animal – a sheep. They return to the *konaki* and they sacrifice the animal. In the afternoon, as the fire outside the *konaki* is being prepared by some of the male participants, some of the female participants start preparing the night's dinner. On the same day, the meat from a bull that has been killed at a slaughterhouse is distributed among the neighbours, the participants keeping some part of it. The Anastenarides then dance several times inside the *konaki*, in preparation to walk on fire. Again, there are breaks between the dances. In the evening they walk on fire. At night, the participants and some invited witnesses eat together and they then wash their hands in “holy” water. On the 22nd of May, the previous day's practices are repeated. However, this time the Anastenarides do not prepare a pyre and they do not walk on fire. On the 23rd of May, the practices of the 21st are repeated again, including the preparation of a pyre and firewalking takes place again in the evening.

Anastenaria Vocabulary

The terms discussed in the following pages create a specific Anastenaria vocabulary, largely based on my field research in Langadas. The meaning of some of these terms is unknown among Greek people who are not familiar with this ritual performance. The use of these terms facilitates the communication between the members of the Anastenaria groups. It also marks their differentiation from those who are not part of them. The vocabulary below is in dialogue with other scholars' investigations on the Anastenaria. They have chosen terms among those used by the members of the Anastenaria groups at the places where the ritual takes place.

In Greek language Anastenaria is a plural noun. It probably derives from the Greek word *ana-stenazo*, meaning “to breathe again” or “to sigh.” The word may constitute a reference to the *anastenagmos*, the sigh exhaled by participants entering this particular state that has been defined by scholars such as Anastasios Hourmouziadis and Katerina Kakouri as ecstatic ¹. It may be worth noting that the sigh (producing sounds such as *ich-ach*), this deep, “double” breath, with the audible expiration, functions as a way of restarting the breath, keeping the airways open and renewing the air that circulates inside the lungs.

Another potential root of the noun Anastenaria is the ancient Greek verb *anistemi*, which means “to wake somebody up”, “to bring the dead back to life/to awaken the dead”, “to make people migrate, leave their homeland” as well as “to wake up” and “to resurrect.” The element of renewal implied by “ana,” meaning “again,” the modern Greek verb *anastenazo* meaning “to breathe again,” seems to be linked with all the potential meanings of the word Anastenaria. However, this element acquires a particular dimension in the sense that *anistemi* might also be employed to

denote migration. In that use renewal might imply eventual violence (forcing people to migrate) and loss (of social relations, status, home and homeland), whereas the new state awaiting the emigrants has not been defined yet and therefore its sustainability is not guaranteed. However, in this last case as well as in all the previous ones, a transition from a previous state to a new one is implied. A breath followed by another breath, sleep followed by awakening, death followed by a new life, and a homeland that one assumes will be substituted by some new land.

The noun *Anastenaria* has been used by scholars such as Hourmouziadis and Dimitris Xygalatas as well as by participants in Saint Helen, in order to designate the participants themselves ². However, most of the scholars who have written on the subject have used the word in order to designate not the participants but rather what they take part in, which has been referred to as “custom” ³, “ritual” ⁴, or a “ritual complex” that involves a “performance” ⁵. The participants in Langadas, where I acquired my first-hand information, also use the word *Anastenaria* when referring to what they take part in and not to themselves. I am using it as singular in English, to refer to a ritual performance complex seen as an integrated whole.

Participants in the *Anastenaria* are generally known as *Anastenarides*. The Bulgarian equivalent term *Nistenari* equally derives from Greek, possibly implying that the most common language of the inhabitants of Kosti (called *Kostilides*) and its nearby villages, which most of the *Anastenarides* of the Balkans claim to share as their place of origin, was Greek before the migrations ⁶. *Anastenarides* is the plural used in order to simultaneously refer to both sexes. The masculine singular is *Anastenaris*. The feminine singular is *Anastenarissa*. The feminine plural is *Anastenarisses*. The leader of the participants is known as *Archianastenaris* (chief-*Anastenaris*) or *pappous* (grandfather). The chief-*Anastenaris* keeps this authority

throughout his life. I choose to use these notions frequently throughout the thesis, instead of using for example the word “ritual”, or “initiates”⁷ etc. I do this because they refer to the specific ritual performance and they are also used by the participants in Langadas, as was confirmed during my visits there.

Each Anastenaris is given a red scarf by the grandfather. This red scarf is called *semadi* (sign or mark)⁸. The Anastenarides I met in Langadas tended to wear dark coloured clothes. However, they did not wear a particular costume. The bright red *semadi* constituted the only visible sign that the person wearing it was an Anastenaris.

The word ‘participant’ will be used as synonymous with the word Anastenaris, and in contrast to ‘witness.’ By ‘participant’ I mean the person who is wearing a *semadi* (red scarf) in order to take part in all or some of the Anastenaria practices as they were introduced in the Summary. A participant is a member of the Anastenarides group. In contrast, a ‘witness’ does not wear a *semadi* and is not a member of the group. Wearing the *semadi* or not is considered as a fundamental difference between these two groups of people.

The distinction between ‘participant’ and ‘witness’ is used for purposes of clarity and not in order to over-simplify the constant dialogue between the two terms. During the visits in Langadas I observed that the witnesses were sometimes participating in the sense that they shared the same space with the participants, in some cases they took part in some of the Anastenaria practices, or they were affected by them. The participants were sometimes witnessing in the sense that they described their own and other participants’ practices and they commented on the witnesses as if they had paid attention to them. They had paid attention to them because they were

interested in the witnesses as potential new participants. The dialogue between participant and witness will form part of Chapters Four, Five and Six.

Furthermore, this distinction is a choice having to do with two terms that are being used by anthropologists, namely the ‘participant observer’⁹ and its evolution into the ‘co-performer witness’ by Conquergood¹⁰. The reference to the words ‘participant’ and ‘witness’ also points out the dynamic and ambivalent role I experienced as a researcher when in the field. The meaning of the two terms under discussion, namely the participant in the Anastenaria ritual and the witness, far from being presumed, or necessarily clear, will be among the critical objects of the investigation of this work.

The house inside which some of the Anastenaria practices such as the preparatory dances and the common dinner take place is known as *konaki*. The word originates from the Turkish *konak*, denoting a house or a habitation. The Greek verb *konevo* means “to stay/to dwell in a certain place during a trip.” Other practices, such as the procession to get the animal, or firewalking, take place outside.

As Loring Danforth suggests and was confirmed by my interviews and discussions with the participants in Langadas in 2009, 2010 and 2011, an Anastenaris, even a very experienced one, will never ‘walk’ if he has not received the *kalesma* (call of the Saint)¹¹. ‘To walk’ is an abbreviation of ‘to walk on fire.’ Firewalking is one among the main Anastenaria practices as they were introduced in the Summary. Firewalking is called *pyrovasia*, from the ancient Greek *pyr* (meaning “fire”) and *vaino* (meaning “walk”).

Pyrostasia means “standing on fire” and it derives from the ancient Greek *pyr* (“fire”) and *istemi* (“stand”). It consists in standing on the coals, the feet touching them for a long time. It is most commonly enacted by the most experienced members.

It is considered by the participants as one of the highest achievements. I saw the Archianastenaris in Langadas enact a *pyrostasia* in 2010. I observed something between *pyrovasia* and *pyrostasia* in 2011, when some of the participants were trying to put out the fire by pressing their feet hard against the coals.

Kalesma, the “call of the Saint,” derives from the ancient Greek verb *kallo*. It has been reported to me by my mother Calliope Rigopoulou who witnessed the Anastenaria at Saint Helen in 1978, that an old and sick woman, who had ceased to be an Anastenarissa for years, suddenly jumped out of her bed and took part in firewalking with no preparation at all, because the Saint had ‘called’ her. My mother also reported that even the local Archianastenaris, the famous Yavassis, had not ‘walked’ then. He lacked the inspiration of Saint Constantine, whose spirit is believed to enter the participants’ bodies and prevent them from getting burnt. *Akaia*, “the state of not getting burnt,” is an ancient Greek word deriving from *a-* meaning “un-” and *kaio* meaning “burn.”

I am using the word inspiration here because both this English word and its Greek synonym, *empnefsis*, suggest the entrance into the body of the participant of a kind of spirit, in the form of a respiratory phenomenon. As discussed earlier, “to sigh” constitutes one among the potential roots of the name “Anastenaria.” A discussion on inspiration and the Anastenaria would probably lead to questions that relate to altered states of consciousness, specifically ecstasy and spirit possession¹². These questions are addressed as part of Chapters One, Two and Three.

Being an Anastenaris does not necessarily entail being a firewalker too. Danforth describes the case of Ketí¹³. Ketí was an inexperienced participant, whom the Archianastenaris in Saint Helen was leading away from the fire and guiding “around the outside of the bed of coals” so that she does not walk on them. From now

on I will be using the phrase “around the fire” instead: while providing us with almost the same amount of information, it is much simpler. The distinction between these two kinds of actions, ‘walking around the fire’ and ‘walking,’ is used as part of the discussion that takes place in Chapter Three.

The participants also engage with *eikones*, icons depicting Saint Constantine, Saint Helen and other Greek Orthodox saints, during some of the Anastenaria practices. Most of the Anastenarides in Langadas today (by “today” and “now” I will mean 2009-11) told me they are faithful Christians while some of them, especially the ones who come from Greek urban centres, are not. I would verify this during my visits to Langadas between 2009 and 2011. Such evidence may add new dimensions to the discussion on the Anastenaria and an ecstatic state as associated exclusively with belief in a supernatural power, as it has been previously argued by Danforth in his *Firewalking and Religious Healing; the Anastenaria in Greece and the American Firewalking Movement* 14.

Furthermore, I offer this note here because the role played by the Greek Orthodox Church has been linked by scholars such as Danforth 15 and Xygalatas 16 to the discourse on the Anastenaria and the continuities of Greek culture. This discourse is addressed in some detail in the pages that follow.

In order for the Anastenaria to begin, each participant washes her/his hands and face with *aghiasma*, meaning “holy water.” *Aghiasma* is also used as part of the Greek Orthodox liturgies. It is water that has been blessed by a priest. In Hourmouziadis’ account on the Anastenaria in Eastern Thrace at the end of the nineteenth century 17, the word *aghiasma* is also used to signify the rock from which many holy springs come. As he explains, the holy water used by the participants in

the different villages during the Anastenaria came from these holy springs, each holy spring belonging to one village.

The word *kurbani* derives from the Arabic *qurban*. It is used to signify both the practice of animal sacrifice, one among the main Anastenaria practices as they were introduced in the Summary, and the sacrificial victim, the animal itself.

Chapter One - Introduction

THE ANASTENARIA RITUAL PERFORMANCE: AN ECSTATIC STATE, WITNESSING AND RETURNS

Introduction

The question that this thesis engages with is the circumstances and the lens(es) through which the Anastenaria in Langadas can be considered as a ritual performance which survives despite signs of elimination.

The first part of the question, namely under what circumstances the ritual performance survives, might seem, at first sight, superfluous: year after year the Anastenarides gather and perform their practices which, among others, include animal sacrifice and firewalking, in Langadas and other places in Greece and Bulgaria. But this part of the interrogation may acquire another meaning if the use of the term survival is clarified. Reference is being made to the following terms: survivals, preservation, revival and communication practices.

Survivals: in anthropology, the term was first employed by Edward Burnett Tylor in his *Primitive Culture* (1871) 1. Tylor distinguished between continuing customs that maintained their function or meaning and customs that had both lost their utility and were poorly integrated with the rest of culture. The latter he termed survivals:

Tylor claims of an [...] ancient concept, that of motion or change modeled on organic growth, tempted the writer [...] to speak of them as “rudimentary,” “germinal,” “living-on,” or “out-living” other elements. [...] Tylor recognized that the presence of an old ritual, an old superstition, or an old folk-tale sets up a problem of persistence which does not arise in connection with old artifacts made of stone or other durable material. The architect’s and archaeologist’s classificatory use of the term “vestigial” failed to meet this need. But the term “survival,” with its implication of a potentiality to over-live the mortal span of life, tempted and won him. 2

It is the relation to motion and change and the “over-living” quality that I am borrowing in my use of the term survival. Tylor’s term was criticized by Bronislaw Malinowski. Malinowski rejected the suggestion that any part of culture could have

no function or could be disconnected from the rest of the cultural system³. The term survival in the present work means a continuing custom in its relation to motion and change, with an over-living quality and a function.

Revival: when examining the Anastenaria, the juxtaposition between the terms survival and revival may be understood if one has a look at the Black Sea in Bulgaria. There, firewalking, dissociated from the practices of the local Nestenari, is regularly performed by numerous people who are not initiates, are tolerated, if not encouraged by the state and perform for an audience of tourists. Such a revival demonstrates in an eloquent way the difference of the survival of the Anastenaria in Langadas which: 1) is continuously performed generation after generation, 2) is either coldly tolerated, or rather implicitly persecuted by state and church authorities, 3) is by no means limited or exclusively centered around the practice of firewalking and 4) witnesses are welcome but not necessary for the performance to take place.

Preservation: in his *Performing as a Moral Act*, Dwight Conquergood criticizes a form of preservation of dying cultures, which he calls “the custodian’s rip off”:

Bacon provided a striking example of this performative stance when he cited the case of the Prescott Smoki cultural preservation group who continued to perform the Hopi Snake Dance over the vigorous objections of Hopi elders. This group appropriated cherished traditions, reframed them in a way that was sacreligious to the Hopi, and added insult to injury by selling trinkets for \$7.50, all in the name of preserving “dying cultures.” The immorality of such performances is unambiguous and can be compared to theft and rape.⁴

The term survival in the present work negates this particular form of preservation. Such a form was the main reason why the community of the Anastenarides in Langadas was divided: there was a disagreement between the local authorities which endeavored to preserve the Anastenaria and the Anastenarides. The term preservation raises questions that relate not only to the status of the preserver

versus the status of the preserved, but also to the presupposition that something is “dying.” In Langadas there is the need, shared by the participants and some of the witnesses, for the Anastenaria to continue being performed.

Communication: Conquergood, in his analysis of the performative turn in anthropology 5, comments upon Turner and what for him was the necessity of cultures to “look honestly” at themselves, stating that such necessity is one of “survival as much as aesthetics” 6. Furthermore, in his field study of Chicago gangs 7, Conquergood maintained that communication practices within a group are necessary for its survival. He writes: “I have devoted much of this chapter to a description of how street youth build a sheltering world of mutual support and well-being [...] through complex and creative communication practices” 8. The etymology of the word survival points towards the necessity of a relation: the word means “the state or fact of continuing to live or exist, typically in spite of an accident, ordeal, or difficult circumstances.” Such a relation in the Anastenaria is facilitated by communication practices such as silence while preparing for and enacting the practice of firewalking and eye-contact in order to solve a communication issue or in order to decide together on the group’s behavior towards a witness. The term survival is therefore viewed here as part of a relation between the members of the group and through the observation of their communication practices.

This first part of the question is implicitly connected with the second part, namely: through which lens(es) the Anastenaria in Langadas can be considered as a ritual performance which survives. Two lenses are deployed here, which can be summarized in the two questions that follow: 1) how such survival can be traced through focusing on the ecstatic dimension of the Anastenaria in its connection with theatrical thought and praxis and 2) how such survival can be detected through the

methodology of the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria, which is understood as a ritual performance of return.

Chapter One begins with the detection of three points of controversy within the Anastenaria scholarship: 1) the attempts to address the association of firewalking with the participants' belief in saints and supernatural power, 2) the use of first-hand as opposed to secondhand information when witnessing and 3) the discourse which has been called the "search for continuities in Greek culture" ⁹. Through them the three starting points of this thesis are triggered: 1) the relation of the Anastenaria to an ecstatic state and performance aspects for the stage, 2) the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria and 3) the Anastenaria as a ritual performance of return. The first starting point will be developed in Part A which consists of Chapters Two and Three. The second and the third point will be investigated in Part B which consists of Chapters Four, Five and Six.

Addressing three points of controversy within the Anastenaria scholarship influenced the structure of this chapter. Each point of controversy is described and the itineraries that have been followed by preexisting scholarship are addressed. Then, each starting point of the argument is introduced and the theoretical framework that was deployed in order to begin my own itinerary is explained.

First Point of Controversy: An Ecstatic State

Synopsis of First Point of Controversy: An Ecstatic State

A first point of controversy in the study of the Anastenaria can be traced in the attempts to address the association of firewalking with the participants' belief in saints and supernatural power. Such phenomena have been articulated in terms of Greek Orthodox or ancient Greek religion and art, and sometimes a mixture of the two; they have also been described in terms of psychological anthropology and neuroscience ¹⁰.

The temptation detected in some researchers' choice to speak on the Anastenarides' behalf, in what is presented as an attempt to protect their marginal communities, to become their advocate against misleading theories, needs to be seen with a certain scepticism ¹¹. Perhaps such a role, a protector's role, if actively and consciously undertaken, would entail responsibilities that may well exceed the impact of a text on the Anastenaria. The new researchers, by picking a rhetoric among the existing ones, risk finding themselves already within a unilateral position in the discourse on firewalking and supernatural powers. One's own argument may not necessarily be in accord with such a position. At the same time, as is the case with the present work, the argument may stem from the dialogue with it.

This part of Chapter One and Chapters Two and Three trace the synchronic – perceived as rapidly changing – relations between the Anastenaria ritual performance and theatrical performance, suggesting that if the two are to be viewed as belonging to a continuum, this would not make the tensions between them disappear.

My attempt is not to offer one more argument in support of ancient ties between the two. It should rather be seen as part of an effort to look back for the sake

of the present. Such an effort becomes more challenging if we consider that Hellenists' and anthropologists' interest in Greek culture seems to have prioritised the ancient Greek past over more recent aspects of Greek history and culture. However, as one of the main focuses of this research is to underline precise ways in which the Anastenaria relates to the eliminated, the remote past may sometimes become part of such a dialogue too.

Katerina Kakouri viewed two rituals, the Anastenaria and Kalogeros, as part of the same cycle and as an essential contribution to the prehistory of theatre: according to her, theatre could therefore draw from what was already its heritage. My criticism of Kakouri's argument is that rituals as well as the communities that perform them do not remain unaltered. I then move to a critical survey of anthropological positions that related ritual to theatre and had an important impact upon artists of the theatrical avant-gardes which considered the return to ritual as a means to purify and reinvigorate theatrical performance.

The above lead to an attempt to define the use of the term "theatre." What theatre stands for in the present thesis that draws upon the Anastenaria ritual performance will require turning and returning "insistently to the crossroads" where theatre as theory and practice exists, as Dwight Conquergood suggests ¹². This crossroads is traced in this part of Chapter One, which addresses the first point of controversy in the study of the Anastenaria.

Can theatrical performance be considered as at the same time more "free" and more "limited" than the Anastenaria and other similar phenomena? Some specific aspects of the relationship between the Anastenaria in particular – as part of a vaster range of similar phenomena – and theatrical performance are examined. This approach was based on elements gathered from the field research in Langadas in May

2009, 2010 and 2011 as well as discussions concerning theatrical performance with the actress Katia Gerou, documented during the process of writing together the book *When the Heartbeats Change; Discussions on Theatre with Ioli Andreadi* and finally my own theatrical experience ¹³.

At first sight theatrical performance seems to be less threatened by change than the small communities of the Anastenarides. However, from the beginning of the twentieth century, several theatre makers have expressed their need to reinvigorate theatrical thought and practice and the present global crisis makes such feelings more acute ¹⁴.

The actor, the director, the playwright, the scholar often feel the need, perhaps even more than in the past, to discover a source of inspiration and force that will empower them to remain “on stage,” to stay part of the theatrical performance (whether linked with ritual or not) and at the same time to communicate with what they feel as beyond themselves. The space in which they have to evolve is a dangerous one. It includes threats of destructive and purifying fire that has to be experienced and controlled.

Rhetorics

The first modern references to the Anastenaria date back to the last decades of the nineteenth century. Such references contain various definitions and descriptions of the Anastenaria. They also contain several points of disagreement, directly or indirectly expressed. Detecting three points of disagreement, and relating them to the arguments raised by contemporary scholarship, will serve as the starting point for articulating my own argument.

A first point of controversy in the study of the Anastenaria can be traced in the attempts to address the association of firewalking with the participants' belief in saints and supernatural power ¹⁵. One has to choose the appropriate rhetorics in order to articulate such phenomena. These have ranged from those drawing from Greek Orthodox or ancient Greek religion and art ¹⁶ and sometimes a mixture of the two ¹⁷ to psychological anthropology ¹⁸ and neuroscience ¹⁹.

Susan Sansom in "Firewalking: Explanation and the Mind-Body Relationship," gives her own categorization ²⁰:

Natural, behavioural and social scientists, because of their different ways of viewing the world, offer various explanations. Psychiatrists, neurologists, physicians and physicists, for example, explain the ability to firewalk through the language and understanding of biology and physics. Folklorists, anthropologists, and others not coming from the world of pure science have explained the phenomenon with theories phrased in terms of belief systems, positive thinking, altered states of consciousness, hypnosis and embodiment. They are all theories which compete for validity and supremacy and, in doing so, significantly affect the way in which the Anastenarides themselves come to think about the ritual.

The above categorisation forms a well thought-out use of the bibliography the author has had access to. However, I am not adopting her choice to use the more general "altered states of consciousness" instead of "ecstasy," that will be examined in Chapters Two and Three, for reasons that will be explained below. Furthermore, I am not convinced by her last argument – which can also be found in the writings of scholars such as Danforth and Xygalatas ²¹ – that articulating these and other phenomena concerning the Anastenaria in theories "significantly affects the way in which the Anastenarides themselves come to think about the ritual."

In fact Danforth's own criticism on Kakouri and her use of "they" (the Anastenarides) as opposed to "we" (the researchers) may prove useful here:

Note that it is "we" who have the power and the obligation to save "their" rituals because "they" link "us" to the ancient past. ²²

The researcher's temptation to speak on the Anastenarides' behalf, perhaps in an attempt to "protect" their marginal communities, to become their saviour against harmful theories – that most likely happen to oppose one's own – needs to be seen with a certain scepticism. Especially when one wants to avoid convictions that may relate to "our", the researchers', "power" and "obligation" – to borrow Danforth's words. Perhaps such a role, a protector's role, if actively and consciously undertaken, would entail responsibilities that may well exceed the impact of a text on the Anastenaria.

In their attempt to address firewalking and its association by the participants with their beliefs in supernatural powers, researchers have been influenced by the following: their own belief system, the developments in their own field and the scientific improvements of their time and, finally, the argument they wanted to make and its position within the Anastenaria scholarship. As a result, it seems that the complexity of such attempts would make a study of these phenomena as part of the Anastenaria challenging. The new researchers, by picking a rhetoric among the existing ones, risk finding themselves already within a position in the discourse on firewalking and supernatural powers. One's own argument may not necessarily be in accord with such position. However, as is the case with the present work, the argument may stem from it.

On the Anastenaria and the 'God' of Theatre

"Although to be a member of the confraternity is hereditary, we have seen how anyone can be admitted to it who has been possessed by god-inspired ecstasy at the sight of others so possessed." Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka*

The assumption that theatrical performance developed “out of ritual” has had many fervent supporters – the Cambridge Ritualists, inspired by the work of James Frazer, but also the New Ritualists, as Rainer Friedrich has named them, who have “shown an exclusive interest in synchronic relations between Greek drama and ritual, not diachronic or historic” (as opposed to what the Cambridge Ritualists did) – and as many equally fervent opponents – among which Pickard, Else and Friedrich 23.

Although the discussion has evolved and has been diversified in many aspects, it has not reached a point of agreement. In the book *The origins of theater in Ancient Greece and beyond: from ritual to drama*, Eric Csapo and Margaret C. Miller suggest the following:

There is, however, no longer any question of “quantum leaps” from ritual to drama. The categories of ritual and drama are not so much divided as joined by a continuum, and, indeed, anthropology has generated a third term that marks the very expansive middle range of this continuum, namely ‘ritual-drama.’ It is hard to conceive of ritual without some element of drama or drama without some element of ritual. 24

I am considering mostly the synchronic – perceived as rapidly changing – relations between the Anastenaria ritual performance and theatrical performance, suggesting that if the two are to be viewed as belonging to a continuum, this would not make the tensions between them disappear. On the other hand the whole tradition, starting from the Cambridge School of Ritualists, of relating ritual to theatre, with all the controversies it has generated and the developments it has produced, is not something one can neglect.

My attempt is not to offer one more argument in support of ancient ties between the two. It should rather be seen as part of an effort to look back for the sake of the present. In fact as I have already argued one of the aims of this thesis is to use the pool of knowledge created by the scholars who have written about the Anastenaria as well as to witness something that at least two generations in my family have

witnessed. I want to reexamine what has been directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, transmitted to me as a heritage and a burden. I will therefore sometimes risk a shift of focus towards not the near but the remote past.

Such a shift may become more challenging if we consider that Hellenists' and anthropologists' interest in Greek culture seems to have prioritised the ancient Greek past over more recent aspects of the Greek history and culture, which have often been forgotten. However, one of the main focuses of this research as it will be explained in the pages that follow is to underline precise ways in which the Anastenaria relates to the forgotten, the eliminated. The remote past may sometimes become part of such a dialogue too.

I am only addressing the strand of the aforementioned discourse that concerns the Anastenaria. In the recent past, the Anastenaria has been connected either with theatre or with what some scholars call pre-theater, proto-theater and prehistory of theatre ²⁵. Dawkins has described a previous, more rural phase, which he witnessed at the beginning of the twentieth century, having connected it with the Dionysiac mysteries and Dionysus, Bacchus, the god of theatre.

Kakouri in *Dionysiaka* has insisted upon the Dionysiac origin of the Anastenaria, on which she made exhaustive field research at Saint Helen in the sixties, arguing that it was part of a larger seasonal pattern, including the Kalogeros ritual. According to her, Kalogeros consists in a “dromenon” of the “Dionysiac cycle” about the struggle between death and life, darkness and light, winter and spring. Kalogeros also used to take place in Kosti and other places like Vizye, where it had first been witnessed by Vizyenos, and still takes place in Thrace ²⁶.

Kakouri's basic argument on the Anastenaria/Kalogeros relationship can serve as an entry point towards the Anastenaria/theatre relationship that was just introduced

above. As I will later develop, my own testimony also confirms that the Anastenaria forms part of a larger seasonal pattern including the Kalogeros, which presents precise elements that could be characterized as pre-theatric 27.

I have already mentioned several scholars, such as George Vizyenos, who had sustained as early as the end of the nineteenth century that the Kalogeros constituted a revival of the ancient Thracian and Greek ritual of Licnitis, which celebrated the miraculous and tormented birth of the god Dionysus 28. Kakouri viewed the Anastenaria and Kalogeros as part of the same cycle and as an essential contribution to the prehistory of theatre: theatre could therefore draw from what was already its heritage.

What Kakouri did not pay attention to, was a fact that had also misled many anthropologists of the end of the nineteenth and the beginnings of the twentieth century including Robertson-Smith and Frazer, as well as scholars like those of the Cambridge school and psychoanalysts including Freud himself in his work *Totem and Taboo* 29. As Mircea Eliade has stated in the preface of his *History of Religions*, even stone civilizations of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries could not be identical with the stone civilizations belonging to prehistory 30. Rituals as well as the communities that perform them do not remain unaltered.

Anthropological positions relating ritual to theatre have had an important impact upon artists of the theatrical avant-gardes that considered the reference or the return to ritual as a means to purify and reinvigorate theatrical performance. For someone like Antonin Artaud such reinvigoration should involve the end of masterpieces, actors and the stage. The influence of Artaud upon directors such as Julian Beck, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba may have played a role in the use of the Anastenaria as a source of inspiration for theatrical performances in Greece.

The Greek Artistic Director of Attis Theatre Theodoros Terzopoulos, while working for his staging of *The Bacchae*, witnessed the Anastenaria with his actors and used some elements for his production. It was also reported to me by George Papadopoulos, a lawyer I met in Thessaloniki, that Jerzy Grotowski used to visit the Anastenaria in Greece as well ³¹. At least two more Greek Artistic Directors, Sotiris Hatzakis of the National Theatre of Greece and Diagoras Hronopoulos of the historic Karolos Koun Art Theatre in Athens, have visited the Anastenaria in search of ritualistic elements that would inform their theatrical performances ³².

It is worth noting that the Anastenarissa Maria-Louisa Papadopoulou is an Athens-based theatre director and actress; her theatrical background often informs the way she articulates her experience of the Anastenaria, as the reader will see in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

On Theatre and the Forgotten Dionysus; The Avant-Gardes

What follows is an attempt to define further the use of the term “theatre” in this thesis. The deployment of such a broad term has been affected by theatre and performance studies readings, reading plays, books on acting and directing, as well as my own experience as a director, writer, actor and spectator. To combine “theoretical” and “creative” or “practical” approaches is not the most straight-forward of combinations, as it has been pointed out by many performance studies scholars, for instance by Dwight Conquergood, Alan Read and Rhonda Blair.

In his article “Performance Studies, Interventions and Radical Research”, Conquergood refers to this particular dialectics between theory and practice: The ongoing challenge of performance studies is to refuse and supersede this deeply entrenched division of labour, apartheid of knowledges, that plays out inside the

academy as the difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualizing and creating.[...] If we go the one-way street of abstraction, then we cut ourselves off from the nourishing ground of participatory experience. If we go the one-way street of practice, then we drive ourselves into an isolated cul-de-sac, a practitioner's workshop or artist's colony. Our radical move is to turn, and return, insistently, to the crossroads. 33

Alan Read in his *Theatre and Everyday Life* discusses the same dialectics:

The practitioner who avowedly thinks and the thinker who ostentatiously practices can still, unfortunately, be ostracised by those who believe specialism demands a choice between the two. But on closer examination there is no "two", they are one. The idea of thoughtless practice any more than unpractised thought is absurd. My understanding of what theatre is cannot tolerate such separation. 34

Rhonda Blair adds, in her *The Actor, Image and Action, Acting and cognitive neuroscience*:

Like many of us, I'm a hybrid: director, performer, and academic writer. Like many of us, I have been frustrated by the frissures and places of resistance in discussions of the relationship between practice and theory. [...] There is something true in many practice-centered and theory-centered perspectives, and there is also something missing, and this missing thing is located in a more thorough investigation of the integration of these perspectives. Or perhaps it is located in the gap – the synapse? – waiting to be leapt between the two. 35

What theatre stands for in the present thesis that draws upon the Anastenaria ritual performance will require turning and returning insistently to the crossroads – the synapse? – where theatre as theory and practice exists. When I listen to academics I look up to give a lecture or a paper, I tend to notice that, even if they may not be using the professional title of 'actor' or 'performer,' they give impressive performances of the texts they have written. At the same time, many actors and directors I admire, seem to have continued Konstantin Stanislavski's attempt to reach "unconscious creativeness through conscious technique" 36 or, to use Rhonda Blair's words, to "apply science to acting" 37.

This crossroads where theatre as theory and practice exists consists of returning to readings on performance studies as well as books by theatre-makers who created and wrote about theatrical methods. It includes memories of witnessing and

reading/writing about specific theatrical performances. It includes my own thinking as a theatre-maker who followed theatre studies while training as an actor, started directing my own plays a decade ago and then pursued an MA in Text and Performance.

Every person who considers herself/himself as a hybrid must have noticed that such an attempt is not a given. It is a constant struggle, having to do with preconceptions such as the ones mentioned by Conquergood, Read and Blair as quoted above. It is hard to tell which part of these preconceptions is ours and which has been transmitted to us by others. Being aware of such preconceptions and attempting to address them critically formed part of the year-long collaboration with actress Katia Gerou on the writing of the book on theatre *When the heartbeats change; Discussions on theatre with Ioli Andreadi*. This book, written during breaks from this thesis, has been informed by it and has informed it.

Finally, this crossroads that is traced in this part of Chapter One, which addresses the first point of controversy in the study of the Anastenaria, forms the first part of my argument. This thesis deploys the examination of theatrical reflection and practice in relation to the ecstatic element of the Anastenaria as a lens through which such a delicate and complex matter may be viewed: the survival of the Anastenaria, in other words what drives it forward.

Such return to the crossroads could offer one more link between the *konaki* and the haunted theatrical stage that Marvin Carlson refers to. There, the things or the ghosts of past times are called to appear again and perform their roles:

I hope to demonstrate, however, in the pages that follow that the theatre has been obsessed always with things that return, that appear again tonight, even though this obsession has been manifested in quite different ways in different cultural situations. Everything in the theatre, the bodies, the materials utilized, the language, the space itself, is now and has always been haunted, and that haunting has been an essential

part of the theatre's meaning to and reception by its audiences in all times and all places 38.

What my use of such crossroads where theatre exists does not draw upon, is what has sometimes occupied the attention of witnesses, neighbours and journalists in Langadas. The “miraculous” or “magic” side of the Anastenaria, the “secret” of *akaia* – in other words the fact that the feet of the firewalkers are not getting burnt. This spectacular side of the Anastenaria risks monopolising one's attention, therefore obscuring the other side of it that could be linked with a theatre not-only-as-spectacle, or, using Schechner's terminology, a theatre involving elements of both efficacy and entertainment 39.

I have already stated that forgotten practices can be traced when investigating the Anastenaria. According to Vizyenos, Dawkins and Kakouri, the presence of Dionysus, the ancient god of theatre, and Semele, his divine mother, can be traced in the figure of Babo from Kalogeros, the “dromenon” that Kakouri considers as belonging to the same “Dionysiac cycle” as the Anastenaria 40. Some information acquired during my field research will further corroborate the links between the Anastenaria and Kalogeros rituals.

What if one were to detect the presence of the god and his mother in the figures of another “woman and child-in-arms”, the protector Saints, Constantine and his mother Saint Helen? This would offer a striking analogy to Santa Barbara's and other Saints' function as masks for the Afro-American pagan gods. Such forgotten presence can be traced in Yoruba and Condomble, which have also been used for theatrical performances, for example by the Cuban Teatro Buendia 41.

Forgotten practices and the ways in which they relate to concealed and/or partially forgotten symbolisms and psychic aspects is something that has also been the concern not only of anthropologists such as Levi-Strauss but also of the

representatives of theatrical avant-gardes of the beginnings of the twentieth century and their followers in the sixties and seventies as well as more recently 42.

Under the influence of ethnological studies, Antonin Artaud, Gordon Craig and others have tried to introduce – or to reintroduce – what they thought to be the lacking ritual aspect that would permit the transformation of theatre as entertainment aiming to flatter the taste of the cultured bourgeois, to a powerful, universal event capable of revolutionising the life of human beings. Artaud, Craig and the other exponents of the avant-gardes of the beginning of the twentieth century did not produce many plays in that direction. Some of their followers, as for instance Jean-Louis Barrault, who was a disciple of Artaud, tried to investigate rituals for theatrical performances (like the use of Condomble in his staging of the *Oresteia* 43) but afterwards turned to productions which combined this sort of research with more traditional forms. Others, like Grotowski and the Living Theatre insisted on the effort to introduce ritual in their theatrical creations.

I would like to open a parenthesis here in the form of the following suggestion: if one were to use the experience from ritual performances such as the Anastenaria as sources of inspiration for theatrical performances today, this would entail paying attention to the factor of change 1) within the ritual ‘itself’, that is both its surviving and its forgotten elements but also 2) in what the ritual used to perform and what it performs today. Perhaps ‘what it used to perform’ could be elucidated by other, contemporary, younger rituals that have possibly not been subject to such big changes.

In any case, one must accept that many of the characteristics that can be traced in the Anastenaria, and that are distinguishable in many other rituals, namely a particular kind of repetition, a stable structure, a hierarchy that is altered only by death, the specific functions attributed to the participants, the grades of participation, the

reference to superior powers and the acquisition of their help, or an ecstatic state connected to respiration, cannot be found in what can be currently considered as theatrical performance, in the terms that I have so far laid out in this chapter.

Can theatrical performance be considered as at the same time more “free” and more “limited” than the Anastenaria and other similar phenomena? For example, participants in the Anastenaria repeat or believe they repeat faithfully what has already happened innumerable times in the recent and the remote past. This kind of repetition is distinct from the repetition we can find in Western theatrical rehearsals and “runs” in that the relationship to the time, the space, the “props,” as well as the function and the context appears to be different. It seems more similar but not identical to the repetition found in non-Western theatrical forms, such as the “highly traditional theatrical organisations, like those of India, classic Japan and China”, as discussed by Carlson:

The same actors appear year after year playing the same roles in the same plays, wearing the same makeup and the same costumes, using the same movements, gestures, and vocal intonations, all of which are inherited by the successors of these actors. 44

Innovation is on the other hand a rule for artistic creation in modernity and postmodernity. Theatre is part of an industry with specific time limits, budgets, rules, contracts, press etc. Training seems to have been a necessary part of the formation of stage actors of any time or area in the world. However, stage actors of today are mostly trained in drama schools. These do not promise communication of any kind with supernatural powers of any kind. Participation in the show, theatrical or other, is compulsory from the moment a contract has been signed. Breaking a contract has normally important consequences for the person who will be judged responsible.

The Anastenaria ritual performance on the other hand is not part of show-biz. It does not depend on the presence of a public, even if it welcomes it. It does not

demand systematic training of the participants or hours of rehearsals. Participation or withdrawal depends not on contracts but rather on the presence or the absence of the *kalesma*, the “call” of the Saint. We are therefore talking about two clearly different phenomena.

One cannot easily contest these statements. What will be discussed in Part A, however, are some specific aspects of the relationship between the Anastenaria in particular – as part of a vaster range of similar phenomena – and theatrical performance. My approach will also be based on elements I have gathered from my field research in Langadas in May 2009, 2010 and 2011 as well as discussions with the actress Katia Gerou during the process I have already mentioned and finally my own theatrical experience.

Second Point of Controversy: Witnessing

Synopsis of Second Point of Controversy: Witnessing

The second point of controversy that is handled in this chapter concerns first-hand and secondhand information in relation to witnessing and the element of change. The outcome of the critical examination of this second point is that methodological tools such as first-hand and secondhand information, when deployed in investigating the Anastenaria, have been affected by ideologies. There is a need to define/describe the Anastenaria keeping in mind its dynamic character, one not easily incorporated into ideological schemes: some of its elements change rapidly, practices being added, while others are eliminated, from one year to the next.

The question that arises from such an itinerary is what some central choices made in this thesis might have to tell the reader as part of a dialogue between method and argument. These choices include: exploring the ‘ecstatic’ dimension of the Anastenaria, prioritising first-hand information, considering witnessing as a co-performance and choosing to return to the same place, Langadas, for three years.

In order to address the above question this thesis follows traces of performance studies scholars such as Richard Schechner, who has emphasised the interdisciplinary quality of these studies as providing helpful tools for looking and Dwight Conquergood who has provided ways by which to understand performance encouraging us to think of it as “an optic and operator of research”⁴⁵. Conquergood, espousing what Victor Turner has called the “performative turn” in ethnography, has considered the bodily presence of the ethnographer as a necessary component of “an ethnography of the ears and the heart that reimagines participant observation as co-performative witnessing”⁴⁶.

The first trait of co-performative witnessing as it was understood here is its dynamic character. In my following the particular strand of performance studies that focuses on ritual performance, I am trying to suggest a new way of engaging with the Anastenaria, by providing a tool for its understanding each time, reflecting on it as it is changing.

The second aspect of co-performative witnessing is reflected through the author’s gradual participation in the Anastenaria. The narration of this journey begins as part of Chapter Four, continues as part of Chapter Five and only finds an end – and a new beginning – as part of Chapter Six.

The third aspect consists in understanding witnessing as a co-performance of return. The term “return” is used in the following ways that range from the personal

to the collective. Firstly, I return to the same *konaki* in Langadas every May over three consecutive years and I follow the sequence of practices from one day to the next as well as within the same day as a way of witnessing the dynamic character of the Anastenaria. First-hand information was prioritised because it enabled reflecting upon change in a different way – there was something different at work when change was happening in close proximity to me, in front of my eyes, affecting and, to a degree, being affected by me too as part of a co-performance.

Secondly, I am choosing to examine the Anastenaria in Langadas, Greece. Becoming part of a chain of witnesses who have observed a chain of practices, might shed some light upon a research that in more than one way consists in following traces of predecessors – not only in the sense of family members but also the numerous scholars who have written on the Anastenaria.

Thirdly, the Anastenaria takes place every year on the same dates and following a basic pattern of practices, involving repetitions, in that sense returns from one year to the next, but also from one day to the next as well as within the same day and within the same practice. Visiting Langadas more than once and interviewing the same people over a period of three years, would also enable me not only to respond “in the moment” with the Anastenarides and their practices, but also to constantly challenge my own observations and outcomes on a phenomenon that is both repetitive and changing.

The Anastenaria consists, as is being suggested in the pages that follow, in a ritual performance of returns, repetition and recurrence. It is through such elements that survival of the participant, of the community and of the ritual performance itself are sought.

First-hand/Secondhand Information and the Element of Change

The second point of controversy that will be handled here concerns first-hand and secondhand information in relation to witnessing and the element of change.

Researchers such as folklorists George Megas and Konstantinos Romaïos, theatre studies scholar Kakouri and anthropologists Danforth and Xygalatas, to name but a few, have combined their own with other people's field observations as a basic methodology that would enable them to define and describe the Anastenaria.

Some of these scholars have also adopted an essentialist approach to a phenomenon they seem to consider as remaining unaltered by historical change ⁴⁷. Sometimes not even the most careful researchers clarify that the attributed qualities were based on information that was acquired – by them or by others – in different years and in different places, in Saint Helen or Langadas, etc. Even by comparing the three different visits in Langadas between May 2009 and May 2011, the reader might easily infer that the Anastenaria changes rapidly from one year to the next, sometimes from one day to the next too.

Furthermore, a return to the oldest, the first Greek text on the Anastenaria is necessary. It will point the reader towards the urgency of defining and describing the Anastenaria keeping in mind the specifics of the time, the area and the people. This 'first account' is perhaps also the start of the controversy introduced above, namely the relationship between first-hand and secondhand information in its relation to the element of change.

First-hand/Secondhand Information: Returning to the First Text on the Anastenaria

In 1873 Hourmouziadis published his account of what used to happen before, during and after the “celebration of Saint Constantine” in the area that was then called Eastern Thrace. When describing “the Anastenaria rites,” he referred to processions, animal sacrifices, dances, firewalking and common dinners – practices that I have also witnessed in Langadas. These practices, according to Hourmouziadis, also used to include “hill-climbing,” were observed by “all the inhabitants” and lasted for more days when compared to today.

Interestingly, in his description of what used to happen a week before the celebration of Saint Constantine, Hourmouziadis also refers to the co-existence and collaboration between the Anastenarides and the local Greek Orthodox clergy. Here is the translation of an excerpt describing the celebrations that used to take place a week before the celebration of Saint Constantine:

On the Sunday that precedes the celebration of St. Constantine, a common celebration is performed by all the inhabitants in the valley called Vlahovo, in the area of Tripori. There, many holy springs come from the same rock. Their water is transparent and clear and each spring belongs to one village. A small forest full of trees lies nearby. A procession is going in that direction. The men go first. They carry censers and they are piously blessing the Anastenaria, who follow them holding the dancing icons. The music sounds like a “paian” [ancient Greek for “hymn”]. Then, each pious family brings one sheep to be sacrificed and the gifts of Dionysus and Demeter [Hourmouziadis probably means wine and bread here] to be shared among the people. The procession crosses the river Veleka with the help of wooden bridges and arrives at the holy place. They open the church where the holy springs are and they clean it. Each priest stands in front of the spring that belongs to his village and he chants. A pious Anastenaris gathers the holy water which the people will drink and wash their faces with. They offer candles, censers and money in exchange. 48

Both Danforth and Xygalatas, who largely based his own research on Danforth's arguments, state that Hourmouziadis did not have any first-hand information. Danforth comments on Hourmouziadis 49:

His report, which was based entirely on secondhand information gathered "from bishops, priests, and others" who had spent much time in the villages where the Anastenaria was performed, presents for the first time many of the criticisms and accusations which the Orthodox Church continues to level towards the Anastenaria.

Xygalatas, as part of his criticism to Kakouri, agrees with Danforth on Hourmouziadis' text lacking first-hand information 50:

For the purpose of demonstrating the connection between the Anastenaria and Dionysian rites, Kakouri stresses minor, often arbitrary similarities, ignoring significant differences. She relies on Hourmouziadis's text, which is given authoritative status in her work. She even claims that Hourmouziadis went to Thrace and studied the Anastenaria (Kakouri 1999: 2–3, 11), while he himself states plainly that he had never been to that area (Hourmouziadis 1873: §27).

The lack of first-hand information is linked by both Danforth and Xygalatas to what the two authors considered as misuses and misinterpretations of the Anastenaria. However, Hourmouziadis does not state clearly whether his descriptions were the exclusive outcome of secondhand information or they included his own observations too. A statement that could be interpreted both ways forms part of the same text that was written in *katharevousa*, the form of Greek language spoken by the educated and the upper classes from the beginning of the nineteenth century and was the official language of the State until 1976. According to this statement, Hourmouziadis' informants were "bishops, priest and others," precisely as quoted by Danforth too and mentioned above.

However, the sentence has not been quoted in full by Danforth. Hourmouziadis adds, as part of the same long sentence, that he "managed to find out" (what he writes about the Anastenaria) "by indigenous people too," with whom he "got in touch" 51. This addition makes the sentence more ambivalent. One cannot be

certain where and when Hourmouziadis met the “indigenous people” he refers to and whether they were Anastenarides or not, as he does not share this information. Was this a conscious or an accidental omission? Danforth himself admits that Hourmouziadis was in a “particularly difficult position”:

The hostility of the Orthodox Church towards the Anastenaria placed Hourmouziadis in a particularly difficult position since he was a professor at the Meghali tou Yenous Sholi, a theological school in Constantinople, and was specifically asked by the directors of the school to present a report on the Anastenaria 52.

In any case, one cannot be certain whether Hourmouziadis met the indigenous people in the villages that he so vividly describes, or whether he even saw some of them enact the practices that he also describes in great detail (“Their water is transparent and clear and each spring belongs to one village.” “The men go first.”)

What if he did witness the Anastenaria, as Kakouri, whose knowledge of both ancient and modern Greek language was exemplary, maintains and as one may imagine after reading a text that is so rich in details of movement, colour, timing and psychological precision 53?

If he did, Hourmouziadis then would not necessarily want to talk about it in front of “the Holy Bishop” and “the pious people” present at his talk at the Planar Greek Orthodox College in 1972. They had asked him to investigate the Anastenaria. They wanted to prove the continuities in Greek culture through the argument of some degree of Christianisation of pagan customs, considered problematic and dangerous to the Church. Hourmouziadis’ witnessing could have easily been used by any of his or his superiors’ opponents as an argument against his own or the Orthodox Church’s integrity.

In any case and in order to bring to an end what cannot but remain a hypothesis here, depending on the reader’s interpretation, Danforth’s statement about Hourmouziadis’ exclusive use of secondhand information may lose its absolute

character. One has to bear in mind that Danforth's choice to interpret the text in the way he did, clearly prioritising first-hand information, formed part of an attempt to prove that the discourse on the Anastenaria and the continuities in Greek culture was not based on solid ground. Furthermore, the understanding of this text requires a good knowledge of *katharevousa*, this mixture of both modern and ancient Greek, which even for native speakers has never been a given and without which one may also be led to misinterpretations.

The above example can demonstrate that methodological tools such as first-hand and secondhand information, when deployed in investigating the Anastenaria, have not been unaffected by ideologies. The question that arises from such an itinerary is what some central choices made in this thesis, such as exploring the 'ecstatic' dimension of the Anastenaria, prioritising first-hand information, considering witnessing as a co-performance and choosing to return to the same place, Langadas, for three years, might have to tell the reader as part of a dialogue between method and argument.

Let us now examine another aspect of this second point of controversy, namely perceiving the Anastenaria as an unaltered phenomenon. This will point the reader towards the urgency of defining/describing the Anastenaria keeping in mind its dynamic character.

Contemporary Reports

A certain prestige that the use of "contemporary reports" confers on the research results seems to play an important role in the debate of what the more up to date information is ⁵⁴. In some cases regardless of whether the research's focus lies in

ancient or in contemporary times. This focus may range from Kakouri's interest in "popular religion" as "important groundwork in research into ancient Greek popular worship, of which our knowledge to date presents enormous gaps" to Danforth's attempt to "listen to the Anastenarides themselves" as "our contemporaries and as equals" 55.

The definitions and descriptions of the Anastenaria were not only shaped according to the first-hand and/or secondhand information on the changing Anastenaria practices. They were also influenced by the developments in each different "field" and the individual standpoint/position of each author within it; one's position within discourses which could not but influence one's "witnessing" too 56.

An example of an individual position within a discourse that influences the description or definition of the Anastenaria is Kakouri's, as criticized by Danforth:

Kakouri's main scholarly interest is in the origin and early development of ancient Greek drama. It is this interest which has led her to the study of ancient Greek popular religion, which in turn has led to her investigation of modern Greek rituals. By her own admission, Kakouri, a folklorist, is using the rituals of the people of rural Greece as philologists use texts, as archaeologists use ancient monuments, to "throw light on the darker sides of our knowledge of the ancient world". 57

As a result of her interest and her aim, Kakouri is using expressions related to ancient Greek rituals and drama when describing the popular religion of her day 58.

On the contrary, Danforth did not set out to "throw light on our knowledge of the ancient world." He was very critical towards other scholars' attempts to do so. He was rather interested in "firewalking and religious healing," which became the title of his book and comparative study on the Anastenaria and the American Firewalking movement. Towards the end of his article "The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture," and right after he has argued against the influence of ideology upon research, Danforth suggests that we should "listen to the Anastenarides themselves as our contemporaries and as equals":

Only then will we learn what is important in their lives. It is certainly not the relationship between the Anastenaria and the worship of Dionysos. It is the relationship between the ritual therapy provided by the Anastenaria and the “scientific” therapy provided by the medical establishment. 59

Danforth, too, in the above statement, seems to have projected his own research interests upon the Anastenarides “themselves.” What, as he argues, is a healing ritual, has not necessarily had the same function or relationship to the “scientific therapy provided by the medical establishment” for each individual Anastenaris. The act of listening to “them” cannot but remain partial if not biased.

Furthermore, the worship of Dionysus, associated with the “search of continuities in Greek culture,” has definitely not been the main focus of the Anastenaria research in the second half of the twentieth century as well as in the first decades of the twenty-first. A shift of focus has occurred, from the remote past to the present. Is it likely that the discourse associating the Anastenaria with such ancient worship has not been considered as “up to date” enough?

It seems that even the most careful scholars, the ones who wish to avoid generalisations, projections, or contemporary research ‘habits’/‘trends’ such as the ones mentioned above, have been prey to these traps at some point in their research. However, especially if one is aware of doing so and of the ways in which one’s argument might each time be influencing the witnessing, this does not necessarily need to be an obstacle or a weakness but it can enrich one’s results instead.

A Note on Contemporary Reports

Hourmouziadis is using the descriptions of what used to take place around the end of the nineteenth century in Eastern Thrace before, during and after the celebration of Saint Constantine in order to argue that:

The Greek people preserved many ancient customs that are referred to in Greek mythology. However, these were christianised and the processions and sacrifice and dances became part of the worship of Christ. ⁶⁰

Hourmouziadis therefore aims at providing evidence towards two things at the same time. The following excerpt from his description of the celebration of Saint Constantine gives an example of a hybrid that combines the provision of evidence towards the “continuities of Greek culture” – such as the “frenzy” associated with Dionysiac rituals – with the provision of evidence towards the christianisation of the ancient worship, such as signs of “holiness”:

Because of their enthusiasm and holy frenzy, they dance on the hot coals or walk towards them and stomp on them, retreat, then repeat this many times, as if this was the greatest proof of their holiness. As their feet are fast and thick, and as they are frenzied, they do not get burnt or they do not care when they do. ⁶¹

One might also find interesting here Hourmouziadis’ use of the present tense, despite the fact that his research relates to the past in a number of ways: he wishes to prove the existence of links with Greek antiquity. Furthermore, what he describes has happened in a more recent past. Hourmouziadis does not mention specific years but what he either heard or, as I argued earlier, might have observed, definitely belongs to the past. This use by Hourmouziadis of present tense when describing the Anastenaria indirectly points towards his need for ‘contemporary reports’ mentioned earlier. It may reveal a wish to be synchronised with his readers. Both such a need and such a wish would of course not constitute a novelty. It is rather the norm when it comes to folklore studies and ethnographic descriptions.

However, the matter becomes interesting because both the Anastenaria and its scholarship are in different ways in dialogue with the past: the ancient Greek past or the more recent past(s) to which this scholarship refers. At the same time, a comparison between the different descriptions and definitions of the Anastenaria combined with my field research convinced me that some elements of the Anastenaria

change rapidly, practices being added, others eliminated, from one year to the next.

The use of the present tense points towards the prioritisation of the ‘present’ even by scholars who claim they are mainly interested in the ‘past.’ It may also tempt the reader – scholar or other – to give the dynamic and the ephemeral a durational quality.

Let us consider a few examples. Kakouri in her *Dionysiaka* describes the Anastenaria as follows:

To-day [1963], in the Anastenarian villages of Macedonia, the great public ceremony of the Anastenaria takes place on the 21st May, the day on which the Orthodox Church commemorates the pioneer of Christianity, St. Constantine, and his mother, St. Helen. The ceremony is also marked by celebrations before and afterwards; it includes most interesting sacred rites of which the most impressive and ceremonial animal sacrifice, ecstatic possession by the god-inspired, who remain unharmed by the fire during the fire-walking rite, and an at present somewhat degenerated «ορειβασία» (sacred hill-climbing) by the god-inspired bearing the icons with them.⁶²

To her description I could juxtapose not only that to my knowledge no sign of the practice of sacred hill-climbing can be traced today but also that what she calls a “great public ceremony” has changed over the years ⁶³, at least in Langadas and at least in a quantitative way. For example when I was trying to find the *konaki* I was looking for the first time I visited Langadas, in 2009, only a few people out of the many I asked knew how to guide me to it – or wanted to.

Of course my testimony is not necessarily valid for what used to happen in past times: there is photographic material presenting huge crowds and the *oreivasia*, also mentioned by Dawkins, could reflect what used to happen until the first decades of the twentieth century. The following excerpt from an interview the sociologist and Anastenarissa Mina Machairopoulou gave me in 2009 can help towards a further understanding of this change:

Interviewer: When was the first time that you attended the Anastenaria?

Mina: In 1996.

I: Did you walk on fire from the first time you attended?

M: Yes. I was shaking and crying. I could not stop crying. And I walked.

I: What has changed in the ritual since then?

M: My way of looking at the world has changed.

I: From what you have heard, has the ritual changed compared to the past?

M: Yes, we have some pictures that date back to the sixties and show three thousand people attending. ⁶⁴

Furthermore, as the reader will see as part of Chapter Six, in 2011 the “most impressive” animal sacrifice described by Kakouri was not witnessed by most of the participants and the visitors. In other words, as we will discuss further, changes of time and space seem to have a considerable influence on the Anastenaria, leading to the forgetting, extinction or, sometimes, the re-emergence of forgotten/repressed aspects.

The debate on what the “ecstatic possession” discussed by Kakouri may mean for the current participants forms part of Chapters Four, Five and Six. In any case it is worth noting here that the “god-inspired” does not seem an ideal term to describe all the participants. Some of them, especially the ones who originate from Langadas, are faithful Greek Orthodox Christians. However, not all of them believe in God or in Saint Constantine.

Danforth, who has also investigated the Anastenaria extensively, describes the Anastenaria as follows:

The primary aim of this book is to offer an interpretation of the Anastenaria, a Northern Greek ritual involving firewalking and spirit possession which is performed by a group of refugees from Eastern Thrace, known as Kostilides, who settled in Greek Macedonia in the early 1920s. ⁶⁵

The above definition does not, however, match the elements that one can observe nowadays in Langadas or elsewhere. Common origin is not considered a must when it comes to participating at any possible level – including that of the Archianastenaris, like the present Archianastenaris at the village of Saint Helen in Serres. Nowadays, apart from the refugees’ descendants, the participants also include people originating from the villages in Greek Macedonia and people who claim no

kinship with either the former or the latter, but are residents of the urban centers of Greece. They travel to Langadas especially for the Anastenaria. What makes all these people come together does not seem to be the place of origin. This, as it will be discussed later, is rather part of the narrative that serves as a unifying element, although not everyone shares it in the same way or attributes to it the same meaning and/or importance. Again, change has imposed its rules upon the ritual and even those who claim that “what happens now” is their main concern, sometimes end up being unable to formulate durable definitions.

Dionysus the Anastenaris; From Dawkins to Kakouri: Seeing the Ritual through a Theatrical Lens

Earlier in this chapter I stated that the doubt on whether Hourmouziadis had witnessed the Anastenaria himself might be linked to the time and the place where he presented his report. It was the end of the nineteenth century at the Planar Greek Orthodox College. This might have led him to use a vague vocabulary as far as the supposedly pagan aspects of the ritual were concerned.

The mid-nineteenth century idea of Greco-Christian Greece (*Hellas Hellenon Christianon*) put forward by the historian Spyridon Zambelios – and used in excess by the Greek Junta’s propaganda almost a century later – proved to be problematic each time the relations between ancient Greek religion and Christianity were at stake. Had any trace of paganism disappeared with the advent of Christianity and the persecutions which ensued? Or, as leading folklorist Nicolaos Politis and others have systematically tried to prove, ancient Greek religion and rituals had survived under the disguise of Christian saints and their respective cult ⁶⁶?

Supporters of such survival were encouraged in their efforts by the feeling that this argument would be able to convince philhellenes to sustain Greece in the international contests. On the other hand, those refusing any relation between modern Greek folklore and paganism were either advocates of what they believed was the Christian Orthodoxy, or supporting anticlassical ideas.

The British archaeologist R. M. Dawkins played an important role in this controversy. His views contributed largely towards making the Anastenaria internationally known. They were partially framed under the influence of a theatrical text: Euripides' *The Bacchae*. The text on the Anastenaria by Hourmouziadis and the one on the popular dramatic form of Kalogeros by the novelist, poet and scholar George Vizyenos, had caused both interest and doubt in Western countries. Vizyenos in his article "Oi kalogeroi kai e latreia tou Dionysou sten Thrake" had already sustained the Dionysiac origin of the form of this folk drama, which was celebrated at the same places and by the same people who celebrated the Anastenaria ⁶⁷.

To address such claims, Dawkins decided to conduct research in the field. In his paper "The modern carnival in Thrace and the cult of Dionysos" Dawkins confirmed Vizyenos' argument that aspects of the modern Thracian folklore were a survival of the ancient Dionysiac cult ⁶⁸. He extended the theory of the Greek scholar to the Anastenaria. Through his work the Anastenaria not only became internationally known, but it was also linked to the studies on Dionysus. This resulted in the interpretation of the contemporary ritual through its supposed relation to the ancient cult. At the same time, doubts and questions concerning the ancient cult were answered through the ritual, as both were considered Dionysiac.

This was reinforced by the fact that Erwin Rhode's claim regarding the Thracian origin of the ancient cult of Dionysus remained unchallenged: according to

this claim Thrace, the place where the Dionysiac cult had originated, was preserving rituals of a Dionysiac character ⁶⁹. Interestingly, even after Rhode's theory was abandoned by the majority of scholars, the idea of the undisputed link between Dionysus and the Anastenaria, based on the work of Dawkins, remained unchallenged by a series of historians of religion such as Henri Jeanmaire ⁷⁰.

The question arising for a contemporary reader of Dawkins is the following. A single short visit in Langadas during the celebration is enough to convince the witness that to a degree the description of the ritual by the British archeologist is not in accord with what happens today. The *oreivasia* (hill-climbing that the ancient Bacchants were reported to do in *The Bacchae*) is mentioned by Dawkins and Kakouri. However, it does not, as far as I know, occur in any place today. The people Dawkins and Kakouri call "the bacchants" do not exhale/produce loud sighs or cries ⁷¹. Their attitude could not be characterized as "frenzied."

Did Dawkins, who was an archeologist and not an ethnologist, and later on Kakouri, read the ritual through the lens of the ancient Dionysiac worship and, more specifically, through the lens of *The Bacchae*, in which the Thracian mountain Cithairon plays a central role? In other words, was their first-hand witnessing so influenced by their readings that they ended up discovering what they had decided they should discover? The fact that they have both partially adopted the ancient Dionysiac vocabulary to describe contemporary phenomena seems at least partially to corroborate this view ⁷². Kakouri also speaks of the consumption of raw meat by the Anastenarides, implying that this is a survival of the ancient Dionysiac practice of the "homofagia" ⁷³. There is, however, another possibility, equally difficult to verify: aspects such as the ritual hill-climbing, practically possible a century or half a century ago in a rural environment, are rendered impossible by the urbanisation of the area.

In any case, being affirmative regarding the accuracy of witnessing by scholars of previous periods is not at all easy. Hourmouziadis might or might not have attended the ritual in person. Dawkins' witnessing may or may not have been influenced by the ideas that prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century concerning ancient Greek religion – especially in the UK – combined with his personal knowledge of and love for the ancient Greek world.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the “ritualist” Hellenists of the Cambridge School, Murray, Harisson, Cook and Cornford had sustained that ancient Greek drama, considered as the unique source of world theatre, had sprung from a seasonal ritual pattern. It was time to discover, as Dawkins thought he had done, its modern survival. On the other hand, Danforth may or may not have been influenced by his will to privilege what he thought to be the present and the objective, eventually underestimating, or forgetting, that sometimes elements belonging to what Fernand Braudel has qualified as “la longue duree” demonstrate a kind of surprising persistence.

In any case anyone aspiring to become a co-performer witness of the Anastenaria can count on very few certainties. S/he is basically left with her/his persistent doubts and her/his own limited knowledge.

The Path of Witnessing as a Dynamic Co-performance of Return

In considering my witnessing the Anastenaria as a dynamic co-performance, I am following traces of performance studies scholars such as Richard Schechner who has emphasised the interdisciplinary quality of these studies as providing helpful tools for looking 74 and Dwight Conquergood who has provided ways by which to

understand performance encouraging us to think of it as “an optic and operator of research” 75. Research was understood by Conquergood as both text and performance, as a “conmingling of analytical and artistic ways of knowing” 76:

The performance studies project makes its most radical intervention, I believe, by embracing both written scholarship and creative work, papers and performances. We challenge the hegemony of the text best by reconfiguring texts and performances in horizontal, metonymic tension, not by replacing one hierarchy with another, the romance of performance for the authority of the text. 77

Conquergood, espousing what Victor Turner has called the “performative turn” in ethnography, considered the bodily presence of the ethnographer as a necessary component of such a conmingling in “an ethnography of the ears and the heart that reimagines participant observation as co-performative witnessing” 78.

Co-performative witnessing as a method of performance ethnography aimed at questioning the “entrenched social hierarchy of value based on the fundamental division between intellectual labor and manual labor.” 79 The ears, the heart, the body of the co-performer witness, as well as her/his intellect, were to become part not only of who examines but also of what is examined.

However, Marvin Carlson distinguishes between two different paths, two possibilities for the performance ethnographer. The first one places emphasis upon the ethnographer’s body, “weaving it into the narrative”: he gives the example of Conquergood. The second one is “excluding” the ethnographer’s body: here, Carlson gives the example of Michael Taussig:

The “dialogical” performance of much anthropological work in the 1990s deeply affected not only the encounter with cultural material but also the reporting of it [...] A number of anthropologists sought to write “performatively”, attempting to introduce the evocative, dramatic, open-ended quality of the “dialogical” to their presentation of material. A striking example of this is Michael Taussig [...] Somewhat ironically, Taussig’s bold experimentation with performativity and dialogism in his texts has taken him in quite the opposite direction to other postmodern ethnographers, who have manifested a performative consciousness by weaving their own bodies into their narratives as fully and consciously as Taussig has excluded his. 80

I would agree that Taussig may not explicitly “weave his own body” into his narratives. However, sometimes he, too, becomes “the chameleon that is at all times and all places the unknowable, freaky entity that is ethnography and the ethnographer”⁸¹. He allows his body to be present in another way, that of a chameleon, whose body reflects its environment. For example, he quotes Walter Benjamin writing on feeling and experience in *Walter Benjamin’s Grave*:

As indication of his eccentricity, take “One Way-Street” where he writes: “If the theory is correct that feeling is not located in the head, that we sentiently experience a window, a cloud, a tree, not in our brains but, rather, in the place where we see it, then we are, in looking at our beloved, too, outside ourselves.”

Taussig, by way of quoting Benjamin, in fact articulates his own bodily experience. He states that the above: “sums up what it felt like at that moment looking into the mountain opened out to the sea surging below”.⁸²

Carlson, commenting upon Conquergood’s dialogical performance, recognised in it an interdisciplinary quality:⁸³

Conquergood champions a dialogical performance which aims to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another. The result sought is an open-ended performance, resisting conclusions and seeking to keep interrogation open.

A key in order to understand the dynamic element in my open-ended co-performance has been a short excerpt from Benjamin’s *One Way Street*⁸⁴, in which he writes about how the way one looks may change over time and as opposed to the “first glimpse.” This excerpt will be quoted in full in Chapter Four. What I will attempt through the use of this fragment is to further emphasise upon an element that is also inherent in Conquergood’s “coperformative witnessing” which, for him, is “a kind of performance that resists conclusions” that is “intensely committed to keep the dialogue open and ongoing”⁸⁵.

Over the course of this text, in my following the particular strand of the interdisciplinary performance studies that focuses on ritual performance, I am trying to suggest a new way of engaging with the Anastenaria. As opposed to some aspects of the existing Anastenaria bibliography, my witnessing does not aim at shedding light upon any unchangeable and in that sense almost continuous “present,” but at providing a tool for the understanding of the Anastenaria each time; in other words, reflecting on it *as it is changing*. Memories of what I have read or heard from previous witnesses and the conscious or unconscious influence of my involvement with theatrical performances play a considerable role. However, all this will serve to understand and to perform, through the use of my intellect as well as my ears and my heart, what will be the here and now of my own witnessing, that is part of a dialogue.

I am suggesting witnessing as a co-performance of return. Firstly, the Anastenaria practices, which were introduced in the Summary, and that will be described in detail as part of Narrative One (2009, Chapter Two), Narrative Two (2010, Chapter Three) and Narrative Three (2011, Chapter Four), have been witnessed by me. Such a witnessing included the dialogue with the Anastenarides, in the form of interviews, informal discussions as well as non-verbal communication. It also included informal discussions with other witnesses and some inhabitants of Langadas. Acquiring first-hand information through returning to the same *konaki* in Langadas every May over three consecutive years and following the sequence of practices from one day to the next as well as within the same day has proved to be a consistent way of witnessing the dynamic character of the Anastenaria.

First-hand information was combined with secondhand information. Apart from my entering a dialogue with the scholarship on the Anastenaria, I have also included in my descriptions a few observations made by my relatives who had

witnessed the Anastenaria in previous years. Such descriptions and observations were reported to me orally, yet I was also able to access the filmic material that was the outcome of these visits. There is also one more part of the field research conducted in 2011 that was mediated, namely the observations of my two companions, Maria-Lisa Geyer and Josh Hoglund, who have been introduced in the Acknowledgements. I will be specifying when the witnesses' identities are different, when the observations have been mediated.

First-hand information was prioritised because it enabled my reflection upon change in a different way. There was something different at work when change was happening in close proximity to me, in front of my eyes, affecting me and, to a degree, being affected by me too as part of a co-performance. Perhaps when one shares a common time with the change, when one experiences how the details, the complexity of causes and effects, the different forces may interrelate, one is more capable of avoiding generalisations.

Furthermore, the present tense has already been used in the description of the Anastenaria in the Summary. It will also be used in the more detailed descriptions that follow (Chapters Two, Four, Five and Six). Such a use was challenged in the previous pages as potentially misguided. However, it has been adopted by all the scholars who have written on the Anastenaria and with whom I am attempting to enter a dialogue. Through the use of the present tense reference will not be made to the Anastenaria as something that is “always there”/“unchanged” and “unchangeable,” but only to the Anastenaria as witnessed on these specific dates, namely from the 20th until the 23rd of May 2009, 2010 and 2011.

The second reason why I suggest witnessing as a co-performance of return is the fact that the Anastenaria was observed in Langadas, Greece. This choice was

initially made in 2009, as I had some connections with Anastenarides who go there and I suspected that this would facilitate the practical aspects of the trip, including visiting the *konaki* for the first time, as well as my relationship with their group. Both these elements were considered as important in that they would affect the research results.

After the first visit in 2009, I became aware that the dynamic character of the Anastenaria could be shown with more precision, especially in the limited time frame of a PhD, if, instead of conducting field research to the other villages too, or even to the second *konaki* that can be found in the same town, I returned to the same *konaki* in Langadas in 2010 and 2011.

However, the main reason for my persistence was something at once simple to express and difficult to achieve. The Anastenarides I met seemed fed up of people coming to attend what they consider as an exhibition of magic, in the most vulgar of senses. They do not easily open up to casual visitors. As the reader will notice in Chapters Four, Five and Six, continuing to visit the same place, communicating with the same people, showing a real interest and respect for what they said and did, was part of my effort to deepen the contact with them and the understanding of their practices.

Furthermore, two generations of my family have witnessed the Anastenaria in Langadas. My mother Calliope Rigopoulou directed a film on the Anastenaria in Greece (Langadas and Saint Helen) and India entitled “Nobody cares about my soul” (Greece, 2005). This film was my first visual contact with the Anastenaria in Langadas. When visiting the village for the first time, I did not actively try to remember this first contact. However, I remembered a few glimpses from the film.

And I visited a place my mother had visited, her visits resulting in a work of art on what in close proximity hurts the eye to watch but may be worth confronting.

I did not attempt to enter a different sort of dialogue with this film than the one mentioned above, i.e. to pursue as part of my present research on the Anastenaria any interplay between film and eye-witnessing. I rejected this option believing it could complicate further an already complex project. Such interplay is only indirectly suggested as part of Narrative One (2009, Chapter Four).

I also believe that my becoming part of a chain of witnesses who have observed a chain of practices, might shed some light upon my research that in more than one way consists of following traces of predecessors – not only in the sense of family members but also the numerous scholars who have written on the Anastenaria.

The third reason why I suggest witnessing the Anastenaria as a co-performance of return is that it takes place every year on the same dates and following a basic pattern of practices, involving repetitions, in that sense *returns* from one year to the next, but also from one day to the next as well as within the same day and within the same practice. Visiting Langadas more than once and interviewing the same people over the period of three years, would not only enable me to respond “in the moment” with the Anastenarides and their practices, but also to constantly remember, and challenge, my own observations, perceptions, questions and outcomes on a phenomenon that is both repetitive and changing.

The dialogical aspect of my witnessing can also be seen clearly in my gradual participation in the Anastenaria. The narration of this journey begins as part of Chapter Four, continues as part of Chapter Five and only finds an end – and a new beginning – as part of Chapter Six.

The Anastenaria consists, as I have argued, in a ritual performance of returns, repetition and recurrence. It is through them that survival (of the participant, of the community, of the ritual performance itself) is being sought.

Third Point of Controversy: Returns

In the times of the big drought
Forty years of drought
The island was ruined
People were dying and snakes were getting born
Millions of snakes at that cape
Thick like a human thigh
And poisonous.
The monastery of Saint Nicholas
Belonged to monks of Saint Vassilios
And they could not work in the fields
They could not feed their animals.
The cats they were feeding saved them:
Every morning a bell tolled
And all the cats left together for the battle.
All day they were fighting until dinner time.
After dinner the bell tolled again
And all the cats left together for the evening battle.
It was like a miracle to see them, people say,
One of them lame, another one blind, the other
without a nose, without an ear, some skin missing.
Four bells a day
Months, years, times went by and some more time.
Wildly determined and always wounded
They exterminated the snakes but in the end
They were lost. They could not bear so much poison.
Like a sinking ship
Nothing was left afloat
No meow, no bell.
What could the poor souls do
Fighting and drinking every day and night
The poisonous blood of the reptiles.
Centuries of poison. Generations of poison.

George Seferis, *St. Nicholas' Cats*, 86

Synopsis of Third Point of Controversy: Returns

The second starting point of my argument that this ritual performance should be considered as dynamic and evolving with time leads to a third point of controversy in the study of the Anastenaria. This concerns another central discourse which has been called by Danforth the “search for continuities in Greek culture”⁸⁷. I argue that instead of one continuity one must look for various strategies regarding this concept and for precise elements which eventually constitute returns of the past. I use the term “returns,” meaning: I am interested in certain elements’ potential to survive, to be remembered, to return, to persist in the ways the participants enact their practices, the ways the witnesses observe them, the ways they might be “re-activated” in such a ritual performance. These are specific to the ritual performance as it was observed in Langadas.

If some sort of pattern does return, what does such pattern involve and how could it be defined? I discuss some elements concerning “the past” of the Anastenaria, and in particular the history as well as what we might call a popular myth/historical narrative regarding Kosti, the place of origin of the ritual. The narrative concerning the destruction of Kosti can be associated with persecution, trauma, as well as liberation, healing, survival. This association probably constitutes one of the main abandoned, forgotten or repressed elements of the surviving forms of the Anastenaria.

However, the Anastenaria might eventually, as several other ritual performances in Greece and the Balkans, be considered as a more recent re-elaboration of ancient religion and rituals, Dionysiac or others, which has transformed and Christianised pagan motifs. Such partial transformation and Christianisation of pagan motifs could be traced in the coexistence in the ritual of the infanticidal mother

of the Anastenaria song of Mikrokonstantinos with the figure of the mother as found in Orthodox texts, such as St. Helen, the Christian mother of St. Constantine and co-protector saint of the Anastenaria.

As it has been claimed by scholars whose work will be discussed further in the pages that follow and as I was able to verify, the Anastenaria seem to be part of a broader ritual and cultural pattern, which has a pre-theatrical dimension. It might have been part of a larger pattern also including the Kalogeros seasonal ritual dromenon – folk play – centered around death and resurrection.

. Elements such as the song sung as part of the Anastenaria seem to link the revival of nature implicit in the seasonal ritual with the resurrection of the hero and the salvation from persecution and political oppression. Such salvation is more than implicit in the narratives relating to the forced immigration of the Anastenarides from Kosti.

I maintain that in order to trace how the forgotten can help elucidate the present, considered as dynamic and rapidly changing, we could make one more link, between Saint Constantine, Constantine the Great, the first Byzantine Emperor, and Constantine Paleologos, the last Byzantine Emperor killed while he was defending Constantinople. What is at stake at the Anastenaria could then be interpreted as an expression of the persistent theme of eternal return as discussed by Eliade.

The return to an “origin” links the present object, the present practice, or the present performance, with objects, practices and performances past. Such a return entails the awakening or reconstruction of memory. Its vehicles also include myth and narration. In the case of the Anastenaria we are dealing with more than one myth. The first myth/historical narrative is related to Kosti, the lost homeland. An earlier myth links the Anastenaria either with the Dionysiac rituals, or with rituals taking place

during the first centuries of Christianity. Both these myths are present in the ways the participants perform their practices and the witnesses observe them.

There are more elements from “the past,” that is considered as both history and popular myth: the element of persecution in its many forms, from the Turks, from the Church, from the neighbours, from the members of the same family, in a sense from one’s own body too persists (if we take into account the way Danforth and some of the participants in Langadas have talked about the Anastenaria as the individual’s corporeal and emotional healing). It may be followed by healing, survival, liberation. It may involve remembrance and resistance to such remembrance, repression and return in the ritual performance of the Anastenaria.

I then explain the choice to adopt the term “ritual performance” and I maintain that while some parts of the Anastenaria are still present, some others are today significantly altered, minimised, neglected, forgotten or underrated. Some of the forgotten aspects could be important, not only while attempting to shed light on the enigmatic past of the ritual but also because they may be precious for performance theory concerning what happens in Langadas today. They could also offer inspiration for contemporary performances, theatrical or other.

Continuities or Returns

The second part of my argument that this ritual performance should be considered as dynamic and evolving with time leads to a third point of controversy in the study of the Anastenaria. This third point of controversy concerns another central discourse, which was already mentioned in the previous pages but will now occupy us in a more systematic way. This discourse has been the one called by Danforth the “search for continuities in Greek culture” 88:

It should come as no surprise then that as recently as 1968 one of the goals of (folklore research) several folklorists in Greece should be described as “patriotic or archaeological”(Herzfeld, *Ours Once More*, 11). Folklore research in Greece involves the “collection of the remains (ypoleimmata) of the past [to be found] in the present; the “excavation” of the “monuments of Greek antiquity still living among the people of modern Greece” (Stilpon Kyriakidis, *Ελληνική Λαογραφία. Μέρος Α' Μνημεία του λόγου* (Athens, 1965).

As we have already mentioned, the role of the Greek Orthodox Church was critical in the above discourse since the very beginning of Greek scientific interest in the Anastenaria in Hourmouziadis' account. He first gave this speech at the Planar Greek Orthodox College in 1872, addressing “the Holy Bishop and the fellow respectable people and connoisseurs.” Hourmouziadis “attempted to write on the Anastenaria following the tradition of the School and having been persuaded by the wishes of the Governing Council” 89. It was the Church that initiated the inclusion of the Anastenaria in the preexisting “search for continuities in Greek culture,” thus opening up a new strand of the discourse.

According to Hertzfeld, as quoted by Danforth, the “search for continuities” began as a response to the persecution of Greek culture:

As Herzfeld points out, much of the work done by early Greek folklorists was a conscious attempt to refute the work of the Austrian scholar Jacob Philipp Fallmerayer, who denied modern Greeks' claim to descent from the ancient Hellenes

by arguing that “the original Hellenic population had been completely destroyed and replaced in the course of successive invasions during the Byzantine period”.⁹⁰

By “Greek culture” Herzfeld means here the Greek culture as it was being re-imagined during the nineteenth century by the new state and its people, after four centuries of Ottoman occupation, oppression and persecution.

Danforth has listed the Church’s use of the “search for continuities in Greek culture” among the effects the discourse has had upon the Anastenaria practices, (therefore claiming the discourse has affected some part of “the Greek culture”):

When folklorists demonstrate the continuity of Greek culture and the ancient and glorious origins of the Anastenaria, they are at the same time providing Church officials with evidence they can use in their longstanding attempts to suppress the Anastenaria; (...) And finally, it is the impact on the Anastenaria of tourism, television, even scholarship itself.⁹¹

Xygalatas elaborates on the same subject, using stronger words and also commenting on the negative effects of the discourse not only upon the practices, via the Greek Church, but also upon the Anastenaria scholarship too (therefore claiming the discourse has affected another element of “the Greek culture”):

On the one hand, the theory of the orgiastic origin of the ritual provided the Greek Church with a *casus belli* and triggered a persecution that is still ongoing. On the other hand, this theory has been widely influential for Greek ethnology and served specific nationalist agendas.⁹²

The above assertions by Danforth and Xygalatas contain several correct observations. At the same time, the question of the strategies concerning continuity is so complicated that it is nearly impossible to produce conclusive answers. However, some remarks may help us view such strategies in a more complex way. In the case of Greece, as part of the Balkans, we do not face just one concept of continuity or one political situation, namely that of the modern national states, but more. These are connected with the cultural and political particularities of the area.

The passage from ancient or foreign polytheistic religion to Christianity has not always been peaceful or transparent in the Balkans and the Middle East. The folklore of the Balkans conserved several non-Christian elements, ancient or not. The attitude of the Church towards them was not univocal. As we can notice from some *toichographies* (religious frescoes) and icons, such elements were not always considered as opposing the Christian faith.

Starting before the Turkish occupation and throughout its duration, being an Orthodox Christian distinguished those who were to create the Balkan national states in the course of the nineteenth century from the Ottomans. However, the policy of the Orthodox Church – for centuries the main political representative of the *rayades* (Turkish word signifying the non-Muslim populations, also used in modern Greek to signify the subordinate, the oppressed) – did not always coincide with the policies of the emerging national states ⁹³.

Even after the creation of the Greek state, the Serbian, the Bulgarian etc., the culture of various populations feeling they were *Romioi* (Greeks), Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians did not fully coincide with the official culture propagated by the new-born states. These frontiers did not always coincide with the linguistic, political and cultural realities. The case of the *Kostilides*, who shared cultural elements despite the different languages they spoke and their various national identities, is in that sense revelatory. Therefore the nationalist aspirations of several Greek folklorists and the policy of the Church must not be considered as necessarily identical: continuity did not necessarily mean the same thing for the Greek state, the Church, scholars and poets ⁹⁴. Perhaps the most ‘accurate’ thing would be to assume that instead of one continuity, one must look for various strategies regarding this concept and for precise elements which eventually constitute returns of the past.

Taking into account the above observations I will not adopt the term “continuities of Greek culture” in relation to the Anastenaria, but the term “returns” instead, meaning: I will be locating the elements that return. These are specific to the ritual performance as it was observed in Langadas. They include persecution too, in its many forms.

The Anastenarides and their practices have not only continuously been persecuted by the official Church. They have been dislocated from Kosti, their place of origin, during the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, the Anastenaria in Langadas in particular used to be enacted by one group consisting of members of the same family. That group was divided. The Anastenaria is currently being enacted by *two* mixed groups of indigenous and non-indigenous people. These two groups still encounter the Church’s disapproval and hostility; their neighbours’ suspicion; the visitors’ aggression; the journalists’ curiosity. Their funds and financial support are limited.

The continuous persecutions, the dislocation, the non-inclusion and the difficult financial situation have been and still continue to turn the Anastenarides in Langadas into misfits and their two communities into marginal ones. If some sort of pattern does return, is it limited to the element of persecution? What else does this pattern involve? How could it be defined?

A Myth/Historical Narrative on Kosti, the Place of Origin, and “Eternal Return”

I am basing the following part of Chapter One on some more elements concerning “the past” of the Anastenaria ⁹⁵, and in particular the history as well as

what we might call a popular myth/historical narrative regarding Kosti, the place of origin of the ritual ⁹⁶. I chose the term myth/historical narrative because the following lines present a remarkable particularity when compared to what has preceded them. In fact, the three points of controversy with which we have dealt previously, constitute theoretical questions that do not attract the interest of the Anastenarides. They do not seem to care about the scholarship on the ritual, its connection with the ancient Dionysiac worship and the various disputes among native and foreign scholars.

On the contrary, narratives concerning their common origin from Kosti constitute part of their lives and practice. Discussing them can easily become part of the dialogue one might entertain with them. The Anastenarides originating from Langadas talk about Kosti. As they told me, when exchanging visits with their Bulgarian counterparts they believe that they share a common origin. The *miraculous* element is not absent from this narrative concerning origin and this is why, unless one admits that miracles, in the literal sense of objects of wonder, are part of reality, one can assert that it presents a mythical dimension. However, the historical factor is not absent and moreover the Anastenarides believe that what they narrate has really happened. From the moment they believe in it, qualifying it as myth testifies a feeling of superiority regarding them. The term myth/historical narrative represents an effort to combine critical distance and respect for the beliefs of the community.

What I am concerned with here is not the question of continuity. However, I am interested in certain elements' potential to survive, to be remembered, to return, to persist in the ways the participants enact their practices, the ways the witnesses observe them, the ways they might be "re-activated" in such a ritual performance.

A key for me in order to explore this potential has been Alan Read's approach, drawing on the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy, of time in relation to practices that are abandoned:

The time of abandonment is neither the future nor the past, this is certainly not conceived as a heritage project. The time of abandonment is rather time itself. Time is a series of instantly abandoned instants, time itself abandons itself, we are abandoned in time, just as time abandons us. So there is no permanence to any abandoned state, though each instant waits to be charged afresh from a sequence that Walter Benjamin suggested required us to face the past like Paul Klee's angel of history. 97

Such dynamic view of abandonment may enter a conversation with the work of Roberto Esposito on community, which will be used extensively in Chapters Four, Five and Six, and how community relates to the "origin" 98:

All of the stories that tell of the founding crime, the collective crime, the ritual assassination, the sacrificial victim featured in the history of civilization don't do anything else except evoke metaphorically the delinquere that keeps us together, in the technical sense of "to lack" and "to be wanting"; the breach, the trauma, the lacuna out of which we originate. Not the Origin but its absence, its withdrawal.

What if, for lack of proof or because of lack of such interest, one were to claim the absence of an origin for the Anastenaria (Dionysiac ritual? Other?), if one were to abandon, or to momentarily forget, such discussion on the origin? In that case what could one seek in the popular myth/historical narrative on the abandoned place of origin, Kosti, in a gesture of making up for this abandonment of origin of the Anastenaria? What would such investigation entail, apart from the remembrance of the trauma, of the breach? And could it at least serve as an excuse for a discussion to begin – as in a sense any story/fiction/myth on an origin does – providing the mind with the peace of a starting point?

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Anastenarides, Greeks as well as Bulgarians, claim they originate from Kosti, a village in former Eastern Thrace, and its nearby villages. With the beginning of the First World War the Ottoman regime proceeded in a large series of persecutions of the *rayades*. Kosti was

burnt down in 1914. The village still exists. Interestingly enough, another village of the region is called Kameno, a word that in Greek means “the burnt one.” The last wave of immigrants from Eastern Thrace arrived in Greece at the time of the general exodus of the Greeks from Asia Minor in 1922. In 1938 a village called Neo (New) Kosti numbering 531 inhabitants existed in the Serres district of Northern Greece, where the Anastenaria ritual is still being performed at St. Helen and Kerkini.

One cannot be precise about exactly how many of the Anastenarides who celebrate the ritual in Langadas or in other places in Greece and Bulgaria today originate from Kosti. Furthermore, the chief Anastenaris at St. Helen of Serres is nowadays a scholar from another region of Greece, so being a descendant of the *Kostilides* does not necessarily confer special privilege.

However, the myth/historical narrative of origin has it that while their village was being burnt down, the church of Saint Constantine and Helen in flames, the people of Kosti wanted to save the icon of the two Saints. Someone managed to enter the Church, putting his life at risk. There, the two Saints covered him with their clothes, guided him through the fumes to the place where their icon was and then led him to the exit unharmed. Another version of the myth has it that while Kosti was on fire, the *Kostilides* were saved by carrying the icon of the Saints and walking through the flames.

How large a part of this story really happened? Were all the people of Kosti Anastenarides? Were they all saved? Were the Anastenaria practices formed after the precise collective trauma? No. Leaving aside the Dionysiac origin theory, there is no doubt that they already existed in Northeastern Thrace before 1914. The Anastenaria, whose historic origin has not been traced so far, acquired with the 1914 events a new myth/historical reference. Could such reference relate to some permanent ability the

Kostilides had of not getting burnt (*akaia*)? Or rather was this *akaia* only produced by the call (*kalesma*) of the Saints, whose icon they were holding?

On the other hand, could one exclude that the burning of Kosti was not due to ‘ethnic’ reasons but it happened due to reasons of another kind? A few years before the destruction of Kosti, the ascending nationalist Neoturk political movement had started to attack minorities, perhaps in a more systematic way than what the Ottoman Empire had done for centuries. In that sense, the village of ritual *akaia* was destroyed by fire. In any case, the contemporary Anastenarides do not feel they possess any extraordinary powers. To the (limited) extent that a contemporary source on *akaia* could shed light on a much older incident, as one of the participants in the ritual in Langadas has told me:

We are normal. Yesterday my hand got burnt when I was smoking a cigarette.

The visitors of the different *konakia* in Greece discover that there are cases when some Anastenarides are not Greek but Bulgarian. In 2000, when my acting teacher Katia Gerou visited Langadas, the musicians were Bulgarian *Nestenari*. The groups performing the ritual may in some cases be multi- or transcultural. What are the Anastenarides ethnically? They are not only Greeks but also Bulgarians (and Gypsies, Serbs, or other natives of the Balkans) and on some occasions Anastenarides who belong to different ethnic groups participate in the ritual taking place either in Greece or in Bulgaria.

How many are the places where the ritual is celebrated and to what extent does the celebration differ between each of them? Despite the information acquired from the participants in Langadas, up to this date a thorough map of all the Anastenaria centers in Greece and abroad has not been published. Such an attempt would be

difficult as sometimes small groups celebrate rather unnoticed the Anastenaria in large urban centers such as Athens and Thessaloniki.

The name of the place of origin, Kosti, probably means that the Anastenarides at Kosti were Greeks. This is more certain at a cultural and linguistic level. As we have already stated, what we call today a national identity did not exist then. Eastern Romylia, today belonging to Bulgaria, was a region where multiculturalism was very much present until the emergence of nationalisms.

This emergence caused a long series of clashes, wars and occupations of territories. It led to the formation of the various conflicting contemporary Balkan ethnic identities. Conflicting nationalisms, the Cold War and its consequences, as well as the continuous hostility of the official Churches may explain up to a certain extent why until today, what we might call the “narratives” concerning the ritual adopted by Bulgarians and others have not been critically compared with the Greek ones ⁹⁹.

Nevertheless, a series of elements, common in the various Balkan cultures, can inform us on the Anastenaria as it may have been performed in the past or is still being performed today.

From this point of view, one may associate the narrative concerning the destruction of Kosti with – as it also happens with the narratives on the origin of several fire-walking rituals in India – persecution, trauma, as well as liberation and healing and in that sense survival. This association constitutes one of the main abandoned, forgotten or repressed elements of the surviving forms of the Anastenaria.

One of the reasons for such repression might have been the fact that the emerging Balkan nationalisms have, to a considerable extent, memories of a common political and historical past connected to the common resistance to the Ottoman occupation and the aspirations of the liberation from the Turks in a multiethnic and

multicultural frame. Such association can be made if we consider several aspects of the ritual performance. However, reference to such implicit aspects does not exclude considerations of a different kind.

Do the Anastenarides constitute a heresy or a sect? The answer is not simple, as the question of what constitutes heresy and what not for the official Church cannot be easily solved. Any attempts to answer it would have to involve research on particular cases such as the attempted excommunication of the author of *Christ Re-crucified* Nikos Kazantzakis. At the same time, despite the attacks from members of the Orthodox clergy who keep calling them “heretics,” the Anastenarides have kept insisting that they are faithful Orthodox Christians. Furthermore, they have not been actively involved in the quarrel between the Greek followers of the Patriarch of Constantinople and the followers of the Bulgarian Exarchy.

However, the Anastenaria might eventually, as several other ritual performances in Greece and the Balkans, be considered as a more recent re-elaboration of ancient religion and rituals, Dionysiac or others, which has transformed and Christianised pagan motifs. Such partial transformation and Christianisation of pagan motifs could be traced in the coexistence in the ritual of the infanticidal mother of the Anastenaria song of *Mikrokonstantinos* – recalling, as it was first noted by N. Politis at the beginning of the twentieth century, Agave, Procne, Medea and other infanticidal mothers of ancient Greek myths and plays as well as more recent folk tales – with the figure of the mother as found in Orthodox texts, such as St. Helen, the Christian mother of St. Constantine and co-protector saint of the Anastenaria.

In any case the heresy question cannot be easily elucidated. Some observations made during my field research might lead the reader to conclude that there is a second, “hidden” circle of initiation unknown to visitors who are eager to discover and

decipher “secrets.” Even if the Anastenarides have officially sustained that they are Orthodox Christians, the suspicion of idolatry has probably played a role in older and more recent persecutions by official Churches 100.

As it has been claimed in the past by Dawkins, Kakouri and others and as I was able to verify, the Anastenaria seem to make part of a broader ritual and cultural pattern, which has a pre-theatrical dimension. In case we accepted Katerina Kakouri’s argument, as expressed in her *Dionysiaka*, it might have been part of a larger pattern also including the Kalogeros seasonal ritual *dromenon* – folk play – centered around death and resurrection. The principal characters of the ritual are Kalogeros, his opponent and Kalogeros’s wife. The opponent kills Kalogeros in a duel. The wife mourns her husband. He then resurrects and takes revenge by defeating the opponent. The whole mimetic ritual is full of sexual jokes and a prominent role is held by a wooden phallus, representing the beloved baby of the wife.

The fight and resurrection theme may relate back not only to one of the word Anastenaria’s potential roots (“to resurrect”), but also to these more implicit dimensions mentioned above, enabling us to enlarge the list of *dramatis personae* involved in the secret, invisible or forgotten practices. The Konstantinos (Constantine) name is shared by the Saint and the hero of the ritual’s main songs. In one of them, the young boy Constantine – Mikrokonstantinos – gets killed and cooked by his mother, an infidel wife, and then, while dead, cooked and already “on the plates,” speaks and in that sense gains a new life in order to announce the murder to his father.

The song can serve as an entry point to a dialogue with the myths concerning the last Byzantine Emperor Constantine Paleologos and in a broader sense with the persecution/death and ethnic liberation/resurrection theme of Balkan folklore 101.

This theme of the dead leader who will come back to life and liberate his people

ranges from Paleologos for the Greeks and to King Lazar for the Serbs and to Vlad/Dracul for the Rumanians. It is beautifully expressed in the folk dramatic song of *The dead brother* or *The Vampire*, famous in Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Rumania and Turkey. Constantine is the name of its hero too, in the Greek version.

Such elements seem to link the revival of nature implicit in the seasonal ritual with the resurrection of the hero and the salvation from persecution and political oppression, which is more than implicit in the narratives relating to the forced immigration of the Anastenarides from Kosti.

What if, in order to trace how the forgotten and the repressed can help elucidate the present, considered as dynamic and rapidly changing, we made one more link? Between Saint Constantine, Constantine the Great, the first Byzantine Emperor, and Constantine Paleologos, the last Byzantine Emperor killed while he was defending Constantinople? Could what is at stake at the Anastenaria be then interpreted as an expression of the persistent theme of eternal return as discussed by Eliade? Paleologos was not only considered as a kind of reincarnation or Indian Avatar of an earlier Saint/hero, but also, as Vlad/Dracul and King Lazar too (who is a historic person who had the name of Lazarus) he was expected to return in due time as a liberator and redeemer. Eliade suggests a relationship between what is being considered as “precious” here and now as (also) resulting from the return to an “origin”:

Take the commonest of stones; it will be raised to the rank of “precious”, that is, impregnated with a magical or religious power by virtue of its symbolic shape or its origin: thunderstone, held to have fallen from the sky; pearl, because it comes from the depths of the sea. 102

The return to an “origin” links the present object, the present practice, or the present performance, with objects, practices and performances past. Such return entails the awakening or reconstruction of memory. Its vehicles also include myth and

narration. However, some foundation myths, as suggested by Joseph Roach, may have roots “deeper than memory itself”:

By performance of origin I mean the reenactment of foundation myths along two general axes of possibility: the diasporic, which features migration, and the autochthonous, which claims roots deeper than memory itself; these myths may coexist within the same tradition; indeed, they often do. 103

In the case of the Anastenaria we are dealing with more than one foundation myth. A diasporic myth/historical narrative is related to Kosti, the lost homeland. An earlier, autochthonous myth – in the sense that it is Thracian – which can be found in many versions, concerns the more remote past of the Anastenaria. It links the Anastenaria either with the Dionysiac rituals, or with rituals taking place during the first centuries of Christianity.

I suggested the abandonment, the forgetting of the autochthonous myth earlier, so that the focus on the diasporic one could be achieved. Perhaps I also suggested such abandonment because I belong to a generation that tends to abolish such links with the ancient Greek past, considering them as dangerous – suspect of nationalism and of lack of a sense of humour. However, as the findings from 2009-11 proved to me, both these myths are present in the ways the participants perform their practices and the witnesses observe them.

What is at stake at the Anastenaria relates to what is being remembered, reenacted, to what is being performed 104. What is at stake at the Anastenaria now also relates to Kosti, the place of origin. However, it is not limited to it. Earlier rituals that have been associated with another origin, the origin of theatre, are at play too, in ways that will be discussed later.

There are more elements from “the past,” that was considered above as both history and popular myth: the element of persecution in its many forms, from the Turks, from the Church, from the neighbours, from the members of the same family,

in a sense from one's own body too persists (if we take into account the way Danforth and some of the participants in Langadas have talked about the Anastenaria as the individual's corporeal and emotional healing). It may be followed by healing, liberation, survival. It may involve remembrance and resistance to such remembrance, repression and return in the ritual performance of the Anastenaria.

A Ritual Performance

As mentioned earlier in this Introduction, the Anastenaria has been considered a ritual by authors such as Dawkins, Jeanmaire, Kakouri, Danforth, Gousgounis and Sansom ¹⁰⁵. Such qualification may offer a limited understanding of the dynamic character of the Anastenaria. Drawing on ritual and performance theory, I will develop an alternative approach to it.

Certain attempts to establish criteria for defining ritual may prove useful when approaching the Anastenaria. Eric Berne defines the form of ritual as "parentally determined by tradition" ¹⁰⁶. Kertzer refers to ritual as "action wrapped in a web of symbolism" ¹⁰⁷. Turner in *On the Edge of the Bush*, agrees with Van Gennep's distinction of the three phases of a ritual: separation, liminality and reaggregation, referring to the phase of liminality as of crucial importance to a process of regenerative renewal and on liminars as "neither here or there," as "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" ¹⁰⁸. The phase of separation "involves the physical detachment of the participant from normal life and entry into a liminal, transcendent phase" ¹⁰⁹. In *The origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond, From Ritual to Drama* the authors propose some criteria for defining ritual ¹¹⁰, among which one can find the following:

ritual is religious, ritual has a fixed text, ritual can be found in small traditional communities and ritual suggests hierarchy.

How would the above criteria relate to the present investigation of the Anastenaria?

Tradition

There is a permanence of the basic practices: preparatory dance, procession, animal sacrifice, music and song, walking on the coals, common dinners where participants and some invited visitors consume the meat of the sacrificed bull or sheep. The chief-Anastenarides have been called “grandfathers” since the first Greek text on the Anastenaria and through the late nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship. They are still called so today.

Furthermore, there is the element of repetition. The Anastenaria has been studied since the last decades of the nineteenth century. It has been more or less expressed with the same means, such as song, dance, use of sacred icons, animals, fire. The belief that the sacrificial animal should be beautiful, beautifully adorned and suffer the least possible seems to have survived, according to my observations in 2009 and 2010. This constitutes an element that can also be found among the rules of ancient sacrifice ¹¹¹.

There’s also the identity of its forms in at least two countries: Greece and Bulgaria. This corroborates the narration on the “origin” that claims that all the Anastenarides originate from Kosti and its nearby villages. This identity can also be proved through the participation of Bulgarian singers and musicians in the

celebrations of Langadas and the exchange of delegations participating in the celebrations of the two countries.

The above and more examples demonstrate that tradition in the literal sense of something being “handed down” (*traditio*), as well as a relationship with “the past” considered, as explained earlier, as a combination of history and popular myth, are present in the Anastenaria. However, the elimination of some of the practices, such as the procession and the animal sacrifice in 2011, turns the discussion on tradition a far more complex matter.

Symbolism

As argued earlier, the name Constantine may not only stand for Saint Constantine or Constantine the Great, the first Byzantine Emperor, but it also may point towards Constantine the last Byzantine Emperor, a symbol of liberation for the Greeks. Symbolism does not seem to be absent – again, in ways that have yet to be defined.

“Normal life” and “transcendence”

The Anastenaris Babis Papadopoulos said to me in 2009:

Interviewer: What exactly can you feel while walking on coals?

Babis: I feel like walking on a beach. If it hurt I would not do it. I cannot feel the heat.

I interpreted what he experiences as an ecstatic state, though at the same time to my question whether he is in such a state while walking, he replied:

Babis: My mind is *here*. I can hear the voices, I can see the flashes, I can talk and I can stumble. Once I stepped on Mina’s foot and we laughed. You feel good, you

change, but your mind is here. You empty, that is how I would describe it. I empty. I do not know where all that goes. 112

Can some area that is “betwixt and between” “normal life” and “a liminal, transcendent phase” be identified through the experience of the participants in the Anastenaria? As I argue in Chapter Six with the help of my two companions’ observations and develop further via Erica Bourguignon in Chapter Three, “normal life” and a “transcendent phase” in the Anastenaria are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They can rather be viewed as belonging to a continuum. Furthermore, there are phenomena such as the radical change of the rhythm of respiration, from which the name of the Anastenaria may originate. These phenomena may not be easily traced by inexperienced visitors and hysteric phenomena of acting out are not common.

Religion

The Anastenaria is in dialogue with the Greek Orthodox religion. Most of the participants say they are faithful Orthodox Christians who walk on fire after having received the call from Saint Constantine. They carry the icons of Saint Constantine and Saint Helen, the Anastenarides’ two patron saints. The eventual substitution of Dionysus, the ancient god of theatre, and his mother Semele by them, as well as the relation of the Saints to the couple son/mother presented in the forgotten words of the songs sang during the ritual – forgotten in that the Anastenarides sing only small parts of the songs and do not seem to pay attention to the meaning of the words – constitute a question of prime importance for the relation with violence as well as the dialogue with stage practice. Furthermore, my field research proves that not all the participants are faithful Christians, which in turn suggests a conditional use of the word religion.

Fixed text

This discussion depends on what one considers as “text”: if one was to understand text in the Anastenaria as written or oral narration, one would perhaps want to take into account that the same traditional songs containing the same narrations/lyrics are being heard year after year. In any case I was surprised to discover that the texts of the traditional songs were either marginalized or eliminated not only by most of the participants but also by more or less all the scholars dealing with the subject. Furthermore, the forgetting of the lyrics and, in some cases, the substitution of the human voice by a radio-cassette recorder might, at least to a certain extent, challenge the notion of ‘fixed text.’

Small traditional communities

If one was to understand traditional as the dialogue with certain aspects of tradition, in the literal sense of something being handed down, then there is a permanence of the basic ritualistic practices, the element of repetition and the identity of the Anastenaria forms in at least two countries. At the same time, not all the members of the Anastenaria communities come from or reside in Langadas: another aspect of the term traditional, implying indigeneity, may be challenged ¹¹³. The two communities in Langadas do not exceed twenty people each.

Hierarchy

The participants seem to respect the chief Anastenaris. This is what they communicated to me, for example when they were praising him, as the reader will see in Chapter Four. His opinion seems to be the dominant one when it comes to their decision-making process. The new Archianastenaris obtains an equally life-long authority which is passed to him by the previous Archianastenaris. In some cases this man executes the most difficult part of the ritualistic practices, yet his authority is mainly spiritual.

Furthermore, there is a more or less stable community, whose members do not dwell at the same place during the rest of the year. It accepts new members after they have accomplished some more or less formal tasks and they have proved their interest. I am not using the notion “initiation,” because the *kalesma*, the “call” of the Saints can happen to anyone who either participates or even simply attends the celebration. In 2011 what seemed like an important decision associated with initiation was made by a senior member of the group and not by the Archianastenaris. The discussion on hierarchy is a complex matter that will become clearer in the Chapters that follow.

The above criteria regarding the definition of ritual in relation to the present investigation of the Anastenaria do not seem to suffice here. The dynamic character of the Anastenaria, examples of which have already been mentioned, seems to escape them. In that sense Schechner’s definition in *The Future of Ritual*, may prove useful:

Rituals have been considered: 1) as part of the evolutionary development of animals; 2) as structures with formal qualities and definable relationships; 3) as symbolic systems of meanings; 4) as performative actions or processes; 5) as experiences. These categories overlap. It is also clear that rituals are not safe deposit vaults of accepted ideas but in many cases *dynamic performative systems generating new materials and recombining traditional actions in new ways* [my italics]. 114

The Anastenaria is considered here a “dynamic performative system, generating new materials and recombining traditional actions in new ways.” Some observations that corroborate this characterisation are being discussed in the pages that follow. My choice to adopt the term “ritual performance” in order to define the Anastenaria has been based on these observations.

The Anastenaria claims to offer psychical equilibrium, control of fear and/or aggressiveness, healing, communion with superior powers and the revival of nature. However, bibliographical sources and field research can easily convince us that while some parts of the Anastenaria are still present, some others are today significantly altered, minimised, neglected, forgotten or underrated.

I will try to spot changes which may not always be easily detectable or remembered, imagine the reason they have occurred, and the meaning they may acquire today. The industrialization of the area and the media have inevitably had a deep influence on the surviving Anastenaria practices and this constitutes a reason why their past forms are often forgotten or mechanically reproduced by the participants.

Among those forgotten or semi-forgotten aspects related with past forms of the Anastenaria one can mention the relation with space. A century ago the participants seem to have enacted the event in a large area which included cultivated fields and mountains. Such a different space must have also probably been connected with a difference in movement, the use of the voice and the “sacred hill-climbing” mentioned by Hourmouziadis and Kakouri. What seems to have been a rural or semi-rural ritual in the past is becoming urban today. Langadas today is a small town, although the surrounding rural area provides material means, like beasts for the animal sacrifice as well as symbolic stimuli.

However, the question of space is central. The evolution from open celebrations in a rural zone to urban places has not been rectilinear. Around the middle of the twentieth century and after their dislocation from Kosti, the Anastenarides have had to stop public celebrations of the Anastenaria and to perform in closed houses. Ethnologist Constantinos Romaïos and psychiatrist Angelos Tanagras discovered them hidden in such houses and struggled – successfully – to help them to return to public celebrations.

Today, as the Anastenarissa Mina Machairopoulou and other participants told me, the acquisition of a *konaki* is extremely important. It constitutes, to the eyes of the community of the participants and to the whole of the local community, the visible proof that the celebration is not persecuted but accepted. Furthermore, the *konaki* is a place where reminiscence of the past acquires visual aspects through the imitation of architectonic forms referring to *konakia* of the past.

Konstantinos Romaïos in his article “Observations on the text of the demotic songs of Thrace” is investigating the link between the song “Mikrokonstantinos,” a variant of the Acritic song and St. Constantine, which for him is not a mere coincidence but “most probably derives from a conscious tradition” 115. This is another aspect, to which less attention has been paid both by the scholars who have already been mentioned and by the Anastenarides themselves – who sometimes forget the lyrics. It consists in the fact that the songs sang during the celebration of Anastenaria contain references to extreme familial clashes, infanticides and cannibalism: in short, elements that form very often the nucleus of theatrical plots either in the ancient Greek drama or in the Elizabethan theatre and in other genres.

More or less active participation could be another way of understanding the adoption of the term “ritual performance.” In fact, one can nowadays observe the

phenomenon of the “new Anastenarides.” People, especially young ones, coming from urban centres, such as Athens and Thessaloniki, in order to live this experience; scholars, students working on their PhDs, artists, actors such as the Greek National Theatre’s actress Ersi Malikenizou or directors such as Maria Louisa Papadopoulou, whom I have already mentioned. Not all of them walk on the coals because according to them it is not the candidate participant but the Saint who has the last word concerning such matters.

More than a century of observation and analysis of the Anastenaria has produced divergent points of view and appreciations. However, I visited and studied the Anastenaria as ritual performance because I believed that my effort, as well as the effort of other scientists or artists and past or future co-performer witnesses, is not in vain. Every newcomer arrives in order to ask new questions as part of a reality that, despite what one may momentarily feel, does not remain unaltered.

Vizyenos – who, as we have already mentioned, was the first ethnologist to link the Thracian folklore with ancient Dionysiac worship – in his short novel “The sole journey of his life” talks about a man who never managed to travel anywhere. The only time he attempted to leave his village he started walking towards a tall building that seemed to be nearby. The tall building kept changing spot, being much further than it appeared. In the end, tired, he returned to his village. He never left it again.

What will be investigated further in Part Two – Chapters Four, Five and Six – is the precise ways in which the Anastenaria has changed and continues to change with time. Industrial society, urbanisation, the media play and will continue to play an important role in the Anastenaria, as it was the case with other symbolic expressions of the Greek people ¹¹⁶.

Review

The question of under what circumstances and through which lens(es) one can argue that the Anastenaria is a surviving ritual performance emerges through the three problems presented in this Chapter. Regarding the first problem, the relationship between witnessing the Anastenaria ritual performance and aspects of performing for the stage, would it be possible to examine a cultural phenomenon that is changing, in time and space, alongside another and ignore that the latter, theatrical performance, may be equally or even more rapidly changing?

It is necessary to enter a dialogue with theories and practices that have already for more than a century tried to revolutionise theatre by bringing it back to its “ritual origins” and others that keep insisting that such efforts lead not to the purification and the regeneration of theatre but to something which might as well be considered as no theatre at all.

Yet, these fascinating attempts must be discussed in the same spirit with which one must approach the Anastenaria ritual performance. Even if they claim that they are looking for elements that persist beyond change and even if such an assertion may be tempting for researchers and theatre-makers, they must also be studied in their connection with the each time past and present. Craig, Artaud, Meyerhold and Brecht lived in times of crisis of humanist ideas and repeated financial crises, in periods of great industrial developments and also of the rise of totalitarian regimes that have led to world wars.

What will therefore be discussed in Part One – Chapters Two and Three – is not the exclusive relation of the Anastenaria or other ritual performances with what one might call “ritualistic theatre” but rather the one with theatrical performance in as

much as I have been able to frame it here. Even further references to what have been described as “ritualistic” theories will be made in order to shed light on problems concerning theatrical performance.

References to texts, theatrical texts, that have some very specific characteristics because they aim right from their very beginning at representation, may serve as a starting point. They are texts that speak the unspeakable and invent masks that make us have commerce with the unbearable.

PART A

THE ANASTENARIA RITUAL PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMING FOR THE STAGE: TECHNIQUE, INSPIRATION, CONSCIOUSNESS

Chapter Two

ON THE ANASTENARIA PRACTICES IN LANGADAS: THINKING TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF TECHNIQUE IN RELATION TO THE RITUAL PERFORMANCE

Introduction

This chapter is based on observations made in Langadas, Greece, in May 2009. It consists in the first detailed description of the Anastenaria ritual performance: the reader is introduced to the location, the participants and the Anastenaria practices. The underlying dimension of this description has been defined by scholars such as Anastasios Hourmouziadis and Katerina Kakouri as ecstatic ¹. I am borrowing the term ‘ecstatic’ in order to address such a dimension, the primary reason for this choice being that ‘ecstasy’ forms part of the discourse on the Anastenaria and the worship of Dionysus, god of theatre ².

My thesis stems from this discourse, in agreeing with George Vizyenos, Hourmouziadis, Kakouri and the others who have claimed that the contemporary ritual shares this ecstatic dimension with ancient ritual, theatre’s predecessor ³. As I mentioned in Chapter One, Vizyenos had sustained as early as the end of the nineteenth century that the Kalogeros, a “dromenon” of the “Dionysiac cycle” about the struggle between death and life, darkness and light, winter and spring, constituted a revival of the ancient Greek ritual of Licnitis, which celebrated the birth of Dionysus ⁴.

Kakouri viewed the Anastenaria and Kalogeros as part of the same cycle and as an essential contribution to the prehistory of theatre: theatre could therefore draw from what was already its heritage. Kakouri’s basic argument on the Anastenaria/Kalogeros relationship serves as an entry point towards the Anastenaria ritual performance/performing for the stage relationship that has already been introduced. As I will develop in Chapter Five, my own testimony also confirms that

the Anastenaria forms part of a larger seasonal pattern including the Kalogeros, which presents precise elements that could be characterized as pre-theatric 5.

However, my exploration of the term ‘ecstasy’ in relation to the Anastenaria in this chapter does not draw upon an investigation of ancient traces. Even if the focus on ancient traces has been criticized by Loring Danforth and Dimitris Xygalatas 6, it is part of the work of contemporary scholars such as Anna Misopolinou, whose PhD title is: *Grotowski: Ecstasy and Initiation in Performance* 7. The Anastenaria – among other rituals – is used as an example by Misopolinou in order to talk about the work of a theatre practitioner. Misopolinou observes the contemporary ritual in order to argue about contemporary performance, using what is defined by her as the ‘Dionysiac model’ drawing upon the ancient past:

Observing their dance one can see that the participants, especially when they are neophytes, are in an agony of suspense, uneasiness and agitation. They let out screams of grief and even when not dancing, are not aware of the presence of others. Eventually they step onto the coals where they curse Evil with the words - ‘May it turn into ashes!’ After the firewalking they seem released and happy, smiling and talkative. The above, with the details I will give later in this article, demonstrate that especially in Anastenaria we can observe the Dionysiac model in all its phases of Suffering–Madness–Death–Catharsis–Resurrection–Transformation. 8

I disagree with her claim that the Anastenarides are “not aware of the presence of others” when dancing and when not doing so. Even if this may be the first impression of a witness, as in the case of Misopolinou, in Chapters Four, Five and Six I will prove that the Anastenarides’ state of consciousness does not exclude the awareness of the presence of others – the witnesses as well as the other participants. For example, the participants have reported to me that they are annoyed by witnesses who take pictures of them while they are dancing, and that they sometimes laugh at something that takes place inside their group.

Even if the engagement with the discourse on the Anastenaria and the worship of Dionysus is present here, as the reader has seen in Chapter One and will see in particular in Chapters Three and Five, the term ‘ecstasy’ is approached in this Chapter on the basis of observations made in the field having to do with the body of the participant and her or his actions in a more or less precise sequence of ritualistic practices. Through the observation of such body actions and ritualistic practices I will define a specific technique that leads to an ecstatic state.

In this approach I follow the steps of scholars who have explored the interplay between consciousness and religious experience, such as Erika Bourguignon, who has stated that out of 483 human societies, 430 (90%) utilise at least one technique for inducing altered states of consciousness ⁹. M. Henneberg and A. Saniotis developed Bourguignon’s theory in stating that spiritual or religious states are fundamental to the human brain ¹⁰. Furthermore, in their article “Explorations into the Biology of Emotion and Religious Experience” they try to “reaffirm the significance of ecstatic states and their phenomenological manifestations; how they are triggered via body practices” ¹¹.

The main methodological choices made in this thesis are: prioritising first-hand information, considering witnessing as a co-performance, as a dialogue, in ways that have been explained in Chapter One and are followed through as part of Chapters Four, Five and Six, choosing to return to the same konaki for three years – something that the reader will also see in Chapters Four, Five and Six – exploring the ecstatic dimension of the Anastenaria and allowing my theatrical experience to be, albeit implicitly, present in my dialogue with the participants and therefore influencing my observations. In my approach to an ecstatic state in relation to the Anastenaria I use

first-hand information. My theatrical experience is also present in the definition of a technique.

It is with the help of such specific observations that a discussion of the existing links between the Anastenaria ritual performance and performing for the stage is initiated here, through the description of the Anastenaria in relation to an ecstatic state. In the next chapter this discussion extends to performing for the stage.

For the moment I would like to clarify that by “links between the Anastenaria and performing for the stage” I mean four categories. The first category has to do with the aforementioned discourse on the Anastenaria and the Dionysiac rituals. Examples of this discourse can be found in the work by scholars such as Kakouri, Katerina, Takis Akritas, Konstantinos Kourtidis, Georgios Kousiadis, Katerina Mouratidou, and Kostas Romeos ¹².

The second category has to do with theatre practitioners’ interest in the ritual and their use of it in theatrical productions – especially Greek theatre practitioners, such as Theodoros Terzopoulos from Theatre Attis, Sotiris Hatzakis, the current Artistic Director of the National Theatre, Diagoras Hronopoulos, the current Artistic Director of the Art Theatre Karolos Koun, Dimos Avdeliodis and others, but also international artists, such as Jerzy Grotowski.

Two more categories having to do with these links on the Anastenaria and performing for the stage include: the dramatic themes and texts of the songs that are used as part of the ritual performance, as well as the specific technique that the Anastenarides use, which is akin to the technique of a performer who works for the

stage, in ways that will be discussed in Chapter Three. The two latter categories derive from and overlap with the two main categories.

Let us now return to the discussion of an ecstatic state in relation to the Anastenaria 13. This discussion stems from my description of the ritual performance. It might prove enriching, not so much through the imitation of a set of forms or the revelation of some ‘secret’ practices, but rather through offering a better understanding of the relation between inspiration, consciousness and a specific technique.

The expression “imitation of a set of forms” points towards the work of theatre practitioners such as Eugenio Barba, who have used ritualistic forms as part of their theatrical work. My point here does not aim at disregarding or underestimating this work. As Barba himself maintains in his Preface to *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology, The Secret Art of the Performer* 14, theatre anthropology’s focus on ritualistic form is not sterile:

Applied to certain physiological factors (weight, balance, the position of the spinal column, the direction of the eyes in space), these principles produce pre-expressive organic tensions. These new tensions generate a different energy quality, render the body theatrically ‘decided’, ‘alive’, and manifest the performer’s ‘presence’, or scenic bios, attracting the spectator’s attention before any form of personal expression takes place.

However, there is the issue of transference and translation of form from the ritual to the stage. Sometimes such transference may consist in the imitation/copying of ritualistic form. Sometimes it may mean being inspired by ritualistic form.

Inspiration: as mentioned in Chapter One, I am using the word here because both this English word and its Greek synonym, *empnefsis*, suggest the entrance into the body of the participant of a kind of spirit, in the form of a respiratory phenomenon

– “to sigh” constituting one among the potential roots of the name “Anastenaria”.

The participant is capable of walking on fire only when s/he has received “the call”:

Saint Constantine’s call that inspires and prepares her/him to walk on fire. Without it s/he will not be able to do so. The discussion of what “it” may signify for the participants forms part of Chapters Four, Five and Six.

Consciousness: I am adopting neurobiologist’s Gerald Eldeman’s and psychiatrist’s Giulio Tononi’s view in *A Universe of Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination* 15, that has also been used by Rhonda Blair in her book on acting and cognitive neuroscience *The Actor, Image and Action, Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* 16, that consciousness arises from specific neural processes, that there are some implications of the interactions of body and brain with the environment, and that a scientific approach of consciousness is bound to be limited, as it includes subjective aspects. They work with three assumptions: the physics assumption, which holds that only physical processes are needed to explain consciousness, i.e., mind arises from the brain, so no mind-body dualism is necessary (or allowed); the evolutionary assumption, which states that consciousness evolved during natural selection and is generated by a certain morphology, i.e. consciousness arose only because of a very specific evolution of the physical body, including the brain; and the qualia assumption, which states that the subjective – or qualitative or personal – aspects of consciousness cannot be communicated fully or “translated” directly by science, because consciousness is a private, subjective experience and science is public and intersubjective. Rhonda Blair writes on qualia and acting:

The problem of qualia is an elemental part of why talking about the process and experience of acting is so difficult; one person can never fully know what another is feeling or perceiving. 17

It is with similar caution that I approach the term “consciousness” when observing the participants in the Anastenaria ritual performance. I am aware of the limitations that exist when trying to write in an “objective” way about a term which a probably more “objective” science than performance studies qualifies as “subjective” – at least to a certain extent.

Technique: it is defined as part of the description of the Anastenaria that follows. It consists of a sequence and multitude of actions, such as: repeating – and improvising on – the steps of the dance on the carpet, inhaling incense, following the rhythm of the music, singing the lyrics of the Mikrokonstantinos song, gathering at a specific place (the *konaki*) at a specific time etc. Inspiration, consciousness and technique are discussed both as part of the Anastenaria ritual performance and of the examination of elements of performing for the stage that follows in Chapter Three. However, the use of the three terms cannot but differ, in ways that remain to be clarified. It is through these terms that healing (corporeal and psychological) and survival (of the participant, of the community, of the ritual performance itself) are investigated.

Langadas

In the end of May 2009 I arrived in Langadas to study the Anastenaria. Langadas is a Greek town with approximately seven thousand inhabitants. Half of them originate from Macedonia and half of them are immigrants from Eastern Thrace. Langadas is situated twenty kilometres from the center of Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece. There are regular bus services from and to Thessaloniki.

The town is surrounded by cultivated fields. Langadas, meaning dale, was named after its location. In 2000 BC the area was covered by water and it was inhabited after the drainage. The earth is fertile and most of the inhabitants are farmers, but there are also breeders and merchants.

The name Langadas is mentioned for the first time in a historical description of Bulgarian Zahr's Ioannitsis' invasion of 1207¹⁸. In 1430 it was occupied by the Turks. The Langadiani (inhabitants of Langadas) took part in the revolt of Chalkidiki in 1821. The revolt was called 'destruction' because of its many casualties. The Langadiani took part in the Greek Struggle for Macedonia (1904-1908). Langadas was freed by Yiannis Ramnalis on the 24th of October 1912 and on the 26th the Greek Army entered the town.

The architecture of Langadas is characterized by homogeneity – all buildings are painted in earth tones and most of them are one or two storey high. Only in the center of the town one can find taller buildings. The two major tourist attractions in Langadas are the Thermal Springs – that date back to the Byzantine era – and the Anastenaria – that takes place around the celebration of Saints Constantine and Helen, on the 21st of May and two more times every year. According to one tradition St. Constantine and his mother Helen, the two major protector Saints of the Anastenaria, had visited the Thermal Springs¹⁹.

The two *konakia*, the buildings where the Anastenaria takes place, are not situated far from each other and from the town's central square²⁰. When I visited Langadas in 2009 I could not find them easily. It is common in Greek towns and villages for visitors to ask the inhabitants for directions and for the inhabitants to eagerly give directions. However, the Langadiani I met either did not know or they

did not want to reveal the location of the two *konakia* to me. Many of them said that they have not even heard of the *konakia*, something that does not make much sense in the context of such small town, where everyone knows everyone else as well as the town's major attractions. Might the refusal to give directions to a visitor who was looking for the *konakia* relate to the fact that not all Langadiani, who are faithful Christians, approve of the Anastenarides? The Anastenarides are not approved by the official Greek Orthodox Church. The local clergy in Langadas does not approve of them either.

The *Konaki* and the Church

There are two groups of Anastenarides in Langadas. The core members of the two groups belong to the same family, something that will be discussed in detail as part of Chapter Four. My case study has been one of the two groups, for the following reasons. Firstly, sociologist Mina Machairopoulou, my only contact in Langadas when I visited in 2009, was part of that group. She invited me to attend the ritual as performed by her group. Secondly, my first impression of that *konaki*, when comparing it to the other one that I had accidentally visited, was that it was a poorer, neglected, less impressive space. I was faced by my own preconception that the ritual performance would be more authentic there, in the sense that the practices would be remembered, not eliminated, within a space that seemed so neglected that it could as well belong to the past ²¹. Thirdly, the decision to continue visiting the same place, communicating with the same people, was part of my effort to deepen the contact with them and the understanding of their practices ²².

The group I studied consisted of eleven people, men and women, aged from thirty to seventy. Maria Louisa Papadopoulou, theatre director and actress, Mina

Mahairopoulou, sociologist, Babis Papadopoulos, photographer, Anastasios Gaitatzis, farmer – the participants' chief – and his son Christos Gaitatzis, farmer, the chief's wife Foteini Gaitatzi, housewife, Pantelis Christopoulos, pathologist, Konstantinos Gaitatzis, breeder, his wife Thaleia Gaitatzi, housewife, Lefteris Chronidis, breeder and Georgia Georgopoulou, housewife.

Half of them originate from Langadas and half of them come from other areas in Macedonia or from the large Greek urban centers. The ones who originate from Langadas are farmers and breeders. The others are doctors, scientists and artists. This structure results from the way the group was formed. A few inhabitants of Langadas, originally coming from Eastern Thrace, were joined by people who came to witness the Anastenaria – most of them several times before they finally became members of the group. The Anastenarides claim they are faithful Christians. The way their *konaki* is decorated resembles Greek Orthodox churches: there are religious icons and ex-votos, incense. This can be understood if we think of the Anastenaria practices. What is it that the Anastenarides actually do?

The participants, men and women, worship and carry religious icons in a non-official religious space, in the sense that the *konaki* is not recognized by the official Church as such. They dance inside that space. They burn incense. They sing a secular song – in the sense that it does not mention God or the Saints but a young man called Constantine; its themes are romantic love, war, betrayal and torture. Entering an ecstatic state – whose specific traits will be discussed in the course of this text – they walk barefoot on burning coals. They sacrifice an animal. They keep part of its meat and they give part of it to their neighbours. They cook its meat and they eat it, together with a few invited witnesses, after the firewalking is over.

Based on my observations the visitors who are invited to their dinner consist of the participants' relatives, people who have already visited the Anastenaria in the past and have already established a relationship with the participants, and people who visit the Anastenaria for the first time and either have been introduced to the participants by their family or friends or show signs of what the participants consider as “respect” and “interest” 23.

Their practices resemble the ones of the official Greek Orthodox Church: they share the same religious objects and the belief in the same God and Saints. At the same time they are dissimilar. The official Church normally encourages the separation of men and women inside the church. It prohibits the entrance of women to the most sacred part of the building, called ‘the sacred’ (*to iero*). The religious icons are not objects the Orthodox Christians are allowed to carry, to touch, or to dance with. They are only encouraged to kiss them, after forming the sign of the cross with their right hand, normally three times. They are not allowed to move with their back turned towards the sacred and the icons and they exit the building facing backwards. Nobody dances inside the church. They sing the Greek Orthodox liturgy – that contains several parts from the Old and the New Testament – together with the cantors and the priest. During the liturgy they sit or stand, motionless. They do not eat meat inside the religious building (the church); they consume the symbols of the flesh and blood of Christ – bread and wine.

The Greek Orthodox faith does not encourage the free movement of the body inside the churches. Its practices do not involve men and women dancing together, or walking on burning coals without getting burnt.

The Anastenaria and an Ecstatic State

Scholars such as Hourmouziadis and Kakouri call the state during which Saint Constantine's spirit is believed to enter the participants' bodies and prevent them from getting burnt, via a comparison with the Dionysiac rituals, ecstatic ²⁴. An ecstatic state in the case of the Anastenarides is not produced with the help of drugs, but rather through neurochemical activities in the participants' brains. Such state of consciousness relates not only to inspiration – “to sigh” being one of the potential roots of the word Anastenaria – but also to a specific technique: it is the Anastenaria practices and their sequence that facilitate it.

The definition of such technique may offer a better understanding of the term ecstasy in relation to the Anastenaria ritual performance. Technique consists of six elements. 1. Repetition in the music, the text, the steps of the dance and the times the dance takes place ²⁵. 2. Focus in the gaze, the movements, the energy of the participants ²⁶. 3. Relaxation: free movement of the chest and relaxed breathing, relaxation of the muscles ²⁷. 4. Breaks: between the practices, between the dances and in the course of the same dance. 5. Aural, visual and other stimuli such as the sounds coming from the musical instruments, the icons, the red semadia (scarfs), the incense ²⁸. 6. Togetherness: co-existence in the same space and at the same time with the other participants.

Repetition relates to one of the characteristics of ritual: tradition, as it was defined in Chapter One. The Anastenaria ritual performance has been more or less expressed with the same means, such as song, dance, use of sacred icons, animals, fire, at least since the end of the nineteenth century. There is a permanence of the

basic practices. However, here I will be referring to repetition within the ritualistic practices.

Focus: the participants acquire a high level of concentration in order to walk on burning coals. Such focus that results in the participants' seeing differently can be detected if one pays attention to the participants' gaze ²⁹. In the following pages I will refer to such focus in relation to time, i.e. I will describe its development as being gradual, and I will explain how this concentration interrelates to the other elements I have used in the above definition of technique in the Anastenaria.

Relaxation: I mean here the movement of the body and the movement of the breath when they are characterized by flow. This flow, although observed in the bodies of the participants, is in dialogue with flow research and theory, which Jeanne Nakamura and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describe as having 'their origin in the desire to understand this phenomenon of intrinsically motivated, or autotelic, activity: activity rewarding in and of itself (auto - self, telos – goal), quite apart from its end product or any extrinsic good that might result from the activity' ³⁰. Even if the activity I will describe is intrinsically motivated, at the same time, its result and end product is an integral part of the discussion on the Anastenaria practices and an ecstatic state. My use of the word flow here relates to what is observed in the body and the breath of the participant: ease, freedom, no obstacles, the overcoming of resistance that facilitates an ecstatic state.

Breaks: one of the main characteristics of the Anastenaria practices is, in fact, the breaks between them. Breaks from one day to the next during their four-day festival, breaks between the several practices – dance, firewalking, dinner etc. – as well as

breaks within the same practice, for example between the dances that take place within the same day. The breaks are an integral part of the Anastenaria.

Aural, visual and other stimuli: these include the music coming from the lyra and the *daouli* (a Balkan big drum), the song that is sung by the participants, the *semadia* (red scarfs) that they wear, the religious icons that they hold and dance with, the ornaments on the walls of the room, the blood of the sacrificed sheep, the pyre, the smell of burning wood, the smell of incense.

Togetherness: Maria-Louisa Papadopoulou, one of the participants, told me in May 2009: ‘when walking on fire the presence of the others around me gives me strength’. The Anastenarides do not enact their practices on their own. They gather and do so together. This element is examined as part of Chapter Four and the community of the Anastenarides. I must note here that, since not all participants believe in God and Saint Constantine, what they feel connected to that goes beyond themselves and their community, is something that needs to remain in suspense here. It will be discussed as part of the following chapters, with the help of the more detailed observations and discussions with the participants that are presented there.

In her article ‘Altered States of Consciousness’, neuroscientist Susan Greenfield defines ecstasy as follows: ‘The very word ecstasy means “to stand outside of yourself.” I think phrases like “lose your mind”, “blow your mind”, “out of your mind”, “let yourself go” are exactly what we are talking about’³¹. Ecstasy, the moment of release that is interrelated with the six elements that are mentioned above, is the desired outcome of technique in the Anastenaria.

Technique through the Anastenaria Practices and their Sequence

Let us now have a closer look at the Anastenaria practices as complementary and resulting in the experience of an ecstatic state and walking on burning coals. During the evening of the 20th of May, the participants gather at the *konaki*, a building with grey walls, a small courtyard and an old metal door. The house is open to the public. Its door is open. The Anastenarides dance. Their dance consists of a few steps forward and a few steps back. The steps are repeated again and again. Sometimes the steps forward and back are several, sometimes it's just one. The latter pattern results in the impression that the dance is almost static. Sometimes, in the case of the several steps, when taking the last step forward or the last step back, the torso shifts to the right or to the left. The hands may open too, facilitating the turn of the torso. The movements are repeated. However, they become bigger as time goes by.

While the Anastenarides repeat these steps, they inhale the smell of burning incense. Their breathing relaxes, the torso moves freely up and down. Sometimes, while exhaling, the participants produce loud sounds – ‘to sigh’ being one of the potential roots of the name Anastenaria.

Their dance is accompanied by live music; a *daouli* and a lyra. The music, too, is repetitive. The musicians and some of the dancers sing the lyrics of a song about a young man called Constantine. The story of Constantine progresses as the song moves on. However, the foundation of this progression is repetition, which plays a part here too:

Constantine the young or young Constantine

His mother and him, young

His mother made him get engaged when he was young.

When he was young a message arrived

When he was young a message arrived: go to the war.

At night he saddles the horse

At night he nails the horseshoes

He puts silver horseshoes

Golden nails

He jumps and rides the horse

He jumps and rides the horse and says this:

Mother, mother, my sweetheart,

Mother, look after my sweetheart,

She must eat well in the morning

Well at lunchtime

And when the sun sets

And when the sun sets

She must go to bed

But his mother, the bitch, the outlaw,

The Jew's daughter,

She sat her on the stool,

She sat her on the stool and she cuts her hair...

Some words and phrases are repeated as the song progresses. Together with the repetition in the music and the steps, the repeated structure of the lyrics has an accumulative effect upon the Anastenarides. Their features relax more and more. Their gaze, at first turned outwards, now turns inwards: their gaze is now focused

upon themselves. Their eyeballs do not move towards the ‘periphery’: towards the witnesses or the walls of the room. They maintain their focus, and the more time passes the more the participants’ concentration increases.

Not only the steps but also the dance is repeated several times. There are breaks between the dances. During these breaks the participants talk to the witnesses and between them. The breaks are integral to the Anastenaria practices. They allow the participants’ bodies to rest, they allow them to literally catch a breath – to regain their energy during a tiring process. To interact with the witnesses, creating a social space that forms part of the ritualistic practice. Finally, to be able to start again, to take one more breath, to sigh again.

In the morning of the 21st of May, the Anastenarides gather again at the *konaki*. They all wear their red scarfs, the *semadia*. They then walk, one by one, to another house to get an animal – a sheep. One of them plays the *daouli*, accompanying the procession with the same repetitive rhythm that was used for the dance. The participants return to the *konaki*, where one of them cuts the animal’s throat with a knife, while the others stand around them and watch. After the animal dies, they hang it using a string and they skin it. The Anastenarides go back inside the house, one by one. They dance again.

In the afternoon, the fire outside the *konaki* is being prepared by some of the male participants. The meat from a bull, killed at a slaughterhouse, is distributed among the neighbours. The participants keep some part of it and they cook it for the night’s dinner. The Anastenarides then dance several times inside the *konaki*, in preparation to walk on fire. Again, there are breaks between the dances. The accumulated energy from the previous day and from today will find a release.

In the evening they walk on fire. Before doing so, they dance for a last time. In this dance, the participants are pretty much on their own in the room, as the witnesses have gathered outside, on the street, to find a good spot in order to watch them. When the wood has become coals, and when the night has come, they exit the *konaki*. One by one, again, in a procession. One by one, and at the same time together. It is dark. The strongest light comes from the pyre. Their bodies warmed up, their gaze and energy focused, barefoot, they walk on the burning coals. The pyre forms a circle, which they cross one by one in diagonals. They find themselves in the opposite side of the pyre. They cross the pyre again. And again. One can see their bare feet touch the burning coals. Some of them stand on the coals for a longer time – something that is called *pyrostatia*. After a while they dance together around the remains of the pyre. They now hold hands. The whole process lasts for approximately half an hour. They return to the *konaki*, one by one, in a procession. They dance again. They take the red scarf, the *semadi* off of their shoulders. This signifies the end of the firewalking practice.

The aftermath: the Anastenarides' energy and their gaze are not focused anymore. They are open. Relaxed, joyful and talkative, the participants invite some of the witnesses to eat with them. They enjoy their food while making sure that their guests have enough. They have just a sip of an alcoholic drink. Before having that one sip, they make a wish: 'to next year'. They all wish for the repetition of the Anastenaria, they all wish to return. When the dinner is over, the participants and their guests wash their hands in "holy" water.

On the 22nd of May, the previous day's practices are repeated. However, this time the Anastenarides do not prepare a pyre. They do not walk on fire. On the 23rd

of May, the practices of the 21st are repeated again, including the preparation of a pyre. Firewalking takes place again in the evening.

The Anastenarides enter an ecstatic state without the help of drugs, and without experiencing pain. Susan Greenfield addresses pain as follows 32:

First, we know pain is expressed as other associations: pricking, stabbing, *burning* [my italics], chilling. We know that it can vary, interestingly enough, throughout the day. There are some particularly sadistic experiments where volunteers had electrical shocks through their teeth and had to report when they felt the pain. Amazingly, if that happens, you find that throughout the day your so-called pain threshold (when you report that the pain is particularly intense) varies. But the conduction velocity of your pain fibers has not changed, so something in the brain is changing, something in its chemical landscape; something transient is changing if you as the same individual do not experience the same pain depending on what time of day it is.

Something in the brain of the Anastenaris changes, something in its chemical landscape 33. Such change is produced with the help of repetition, relaxation and focus, with the help of the breaks they take, the aural, visual and other stimuli. The chief Anastenaris describes this experience using the following words: ‘We feel like birds’. Babis Papadopoulos, another participant, describes it as follows: ‘I empty. It is like walking on the beach barefoot.’ This state is not drug-induced, but it rather happens as an effect of the accumulative process described above. As recent findings in neuroscience may help us better understand, drugs are not necessary for changes in the chemical landscape of the brain – and I will end with a quote by clinical psychologist William Richards:

That there appear to be correlations between neurochemical activities in our brains and various experiences, sacred or secular, is fascinating (d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999; Newberg & d'Aquili, 2001), as is the knowledge that dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a powerful entheogen, normally is secreted in the biological chemical factories within each of our skulls, and may well be a factor in so called “spontaneous” religious and mystical experiences (Strassman, 2001). It is reasonable to hypothesize that the biochemical substrate of experiencing always has been influenced and changed by traditional meditative practices, including focused attention, special postures, sleep

deprivation, fasting and particular diets, and patterns of breathing that alter blood chemistry. 34

The ecstatic state that the Anastenarides experience is related to a specific technique that forms part of the ritualistic practices that were briefly described above. Even if such ecstatic element of the ritual, that was related to paganism from as early as the end of the nineteenth century, and that results in the free movement of both the male and the female body, has contributed to the marginalization of the ritual and the hostility of the official Greek Orthodox Church, it is through that that survival (of the participant, of the community, of the ritual performance itself) is sought.

Chapter Three

THE ANASTENARIA PRACTICES IN RELATION TO ASPECTS OF PERFORMING FOR THE STAGE

Introduction

Any life experience is simply that: an experience. It may be complete or incomplete, utterly convincing or mildly suggestive, pure or distorted; fresh and surprising or influenced by many hopes and suggestions. The truth-value one assigns to any life experience is a matter of private judgement and faith. I would apply this same attitude to alternative states of consciousness that occur during periods of prayer or meditation, during times of sensory isolation or sensory overload, during exceptional moments in artistic or athletic performance, or during sacred moments in religious liturgies, sexual interaction or natural childbirth.

William A. Richards, “Entheogens in the Study of Religious Experiences: Current Status”¹

Katerina Kakouri in her *Dionysiaka* has insisted upon the Dionysiac origin of the Anastenaria, drawing a link between her contemporary ritualistic performance – the Anastenaria – and an ancient ritualistic performance – the Dionysiac rituals – which led to the creation of an artistic performance – tragedy².

Furthermore, she argued that the Anastenaria was part of a larger seasonal pattern, including the Kalogeros ritual. According to Kakouri, Kalogeros consists in a “dromenon,” a theatrical ritual of the “Dionysiac cycle” about the struggle between death and life (healing, survival), darkness and light, winter and spring³.

George Vizyenos had sustained as early as the end of the nineteenth century that the Kalogeros constituted a revival of the ancient Thracian and Greek ritual of Licnitis, which celebrated the miraculous and tormented birth of Dionysus, god of theatre⁴. Kakouri viewed the Anastenaria and Kalogeros, which presents precise elements that could be characterized as pre-theatric, as part of the same cycle and as an essential contribution to the prehistory of theatre: theatre could therefore draw from what was already its heritage⁵.

Kakouri's basic argument on the Anastenaria/Kalogeros relationship serves as an entry point towards the relationship between Anastenaria practices and stage performance that is discussed in this chapter. My own testimony also confirms that the Anastenaria forms part of a larger seasonal pattern including the Kalogeros, that still takes place in Northern Greece. The Anastenaris Babis Papadopoulos talked to me about his visit in Mavrolefki, another Greek town. While people were celebrating the Kalogeros outside, singing loud, happy songs, the Anastenarides were meeting inside, and there, behind closed doors, in secret, they were singing their dark songs 6.

Two performances taking place at the same place. One of them behind closed doors. A theatrical ritual, a "dromenon," becomes the mask under which a ritual performance, darker, more sad, occurs. This can better elucidate the nature of the relationship that is investigated here. The Anastenaria ritual performance and performing for the stage: a territory made of masks, shadows, mirrors and reflections, a territory that resists verification.

Anthropological positions relating ritual to theatre have had an important impact upon artists of the theatrical avant-gardes that considered the reference to ritual as a means to reinvigorate theatrical performance 7. For someone like Artaud such reinvigoration should involve the end of masterpieces, actors and the stage 8. The influence of Artaud upon directors such as Beck, Grotowski and Barba may have played a role in the use of the Anastenaria as a source of inspiration for theatrical performances in Greece 9.

The Greek Artistic Director of Attis Theatre Theodoros Terzopoulos, while working for his staging of *The Bacchae*, witnessed the Anastenaria with his actors and used some elements for his production. At least two more Greek Artistic Directors,

Sotiris Hatzakis of the National Theatre of Greece and Diagoras Hronopoulos of the Karolos Koun Art Theatre, have visited the Anastenaria in search of ritualistic elements that would inform their theatrical performances. Jerzy Grotowski used to visit the Anastenaria as well.

It is also worth mentioning that the Anastenarissa Maria-Louisa Papadopoulou is an Athens-based theatre director and actress. Her theatrical background often informed the way she articulated her experience of the Anastenaria, as the reader will see in Chapters Five and Six.

This chapter will start with the reference to an observation I made during my field research in May 2009, with the help of another participant. This will be followed by the discussion of a notorious incident that has occurred during a theatrical performance. This will lead to examining further several questions on performance and an ecstatic state through the deployment of the ‘fiery actor’ metaphor.

The ‘fiery actor’ is a metaphor inspired by the firewalker at the Anastenaria. The fiery actor’s traits, that will be discussed in detail in the pages that follow, are: her/his relation to an ecstatic state; the dialogue between such state and technique; her/his total presence on a specific level and the element of fear; the dream or the fantasy of another theatre, a double of the theatre; her/his relation to the character/person question and to a transitory period of time; disobedience to external rules for the sake of an internal discipline; and surpassing emotional/physical pain.

The ‘fiery actor’ metaphor is a tool to investigate this field created by the tensions not only between ritualistic and theatrical performance but also between the various contrasting visions of theatre, visions that are often present in the same

person. More questions, some of them implicit, will be present during this discussion. These will stem from: various theoretical and creative references to the relations between ritual and theatre, the relations between theory and practice in theatrical and other performances, the role of altered – or perhaps extended – consciousness in such activities, as well as the relations between on the one hand irrational elements and inspiration and on the other consciousness and technique.

On the Firewalker at the Anastenaria and the Stage Actor as Belonging to a Continuum of Performance

This chapter is going to trace the threshold of a dialogue between the Anastenaria ritual performance and aspects of performing for the stage. In a first attempt to define such a threshold, I will start from the concept of performance, taken in the broad sense that Richard Schechner deploys the term:

Performance: the broadest, most ill-defined disc [Schechner offers a model of concentric, overlapping circles, with the largest, the least strictly defined, being “performance” and the other three “theatre”, “script” and “drama”]. The whole constellation of events, most of them passing unnoticed, that take place in/among both performers and audience from the time the first spectator enters the field of a performance – the precinct where the theatre takes place – to the time the last spectator leaves. ¹⁰

Such a definition presents the advantage of being broad and flexible. On the other hand, a look at certain rituals may raise some questions: it is arguable whether the person witnessing some rituals, such as the Yoruba in Cuba or Condomble in Brazil, is exactly what we call a spectator. S/he is admitted on some specific conditions, even if such conditions do not necessarily make her/him a participant. Such a definition seems on the contrary more pertinent in the case of the Anastenaria where, as we will see in Chapters Four, Five and Six, witnesses are admitted on

conditions that are not easy to define. However, as it has already been mentioned in Chapter One, there was a period in the twentieth century when the Anastenaria ritual performance was celebrated in secret, in private houses, with no witnesses at all. It also seems, if we take into account Babis Papadopoulos' testimony concerning the secret celebration of the Anastenaria at Mavrolefki, that at least some moments of this ritual performance concern only the participants, or people the participants know and trust.

Schechner makes a distinction between "theatre" and "ritual," yet suggests this distinction is not the basic polarity. He includes them both in the notion of "performance":

The basic polarity is between efficacy and entertainment, not between ritual and theatre. Whether one calls a specific performance "ritual" or "theatre" depends mostly on context and function. A performance is called theatre or ritual because of where it is performed, by whom, and under what circumstances. ¹¹

Efficacy is a term related in the same text to ritual, on the grounds that it has to do with the following elements: "results, link to an absent Other, symbolic time, performer possessed, in trance, audience participates, audience believes, criticism discouraged, collective creativity" ¹². In the case of the Anastenaria, efficacy has to do with walking on fire, the link to Saint Constantine and to Kostilides past, the witnesses becoming participants, the witnesses being affected, and the grandfather's response "because I found them that way" to my question "why are you enacting the Anastenaria practices?" ¹³

Entertainment, according to the same analysis, is on the other hand related to theatre and has to do with the following elements: "fun, only for those here, emphasis now, performer knows what s/he's doing, audience watches, audience appreciates,

criticism flourishes, individual creativity” 14. As Schechner notes, no performance, theatre or ritual, is pure efficacy or pure entertainment, but rather there are elements of both “categories” of theatre and ritual in both theatrical and ritual performance, the polarity not excluding similarities 15.

The fact that Schechner has associated the notion of entertainment with the category of theatre, even if he concedes that theatre is not “pure entertainment”, raises some questions. When I have “fun” in the theatre I leave with the belated suspicion that something went wrong. Theatrical performances, as Marvin Carlson and Joseph Roach have maintained, are never always “only for those here” 16. They also refer to performances and audiences past, to memories of those who are not here. As for what the “performer who knows what s/he is doing” may signify, this is precisely what this chapter challenges, through what follows.

On One of the Firewalkers in Langadas

Before my first visit to the village of Langadas in May 2009, I was already aware that firewalking was one among many of the Anastenaria practices. This had led me to the assumption that firewalking formed part of every participant’s tasks. Only after my first interviews with the participants I learnt that not all of them walk on fire every time 17. Going back to the information Babis Papadopoulos gave me in 2009, I realized that even an Anastenaris who has walked (on burning coals) many times, does not have to – or is not able to – walk every time. The following passage from the first interview Babis Papadopoulos gave me will help clarify this point:

I: Has there ever been an accident?

B: Yes, some tourists did it for fun. They received burns. The Anastenarides never had an accident. If you do not feel it, you do not do it. If an Anastenaris does not feel it, he does not do it.

I: How do you know that this year you are going to walk?

B: You know. There is no question. It is something absolute. You turn the corner [after exiting the konaki you turn right and face the fire that has been lit on the street] and you know.

As I have already mentioned in Chapter One, from the very beginning of scientific interest in the Anastenaria it was in fact known that an Anastenaris, even a very experienced one, would never walk on fire if he had not received the call. It has been reported to me by my mother who had witnessed the Anastenaria at Saint Helen in 1978 that even the local chief Anastenaris, the ‘famous’ Yavassis, to whom Kakouri constantly refers in *Dionysiaka*, had not walked then, because he lacked that call, i.e. the inspiration of Saint Constantine, whose spirit is believed to enter the participants’ bodies.

The call that is considered necessary in order to walk on fire raises questions related to what we might, at least for the moment, qualify as an ecstatic state. As we have already discussed as part of Chapter Two, in the case of the Anastenaria such a state may include a change in the rhythm of breath, the chest moving freely, the relaxation of the muscles, the feeling that the body is grounded and at the same time light, and being focused. Sharing the same space with the others who are affected, dancing in a repetitive way for many hours, the breaks, the repetitive music, the burned incense, may facilitate such phenomena.

Moreover the whole structure of the ritual, including the dramatic dimension of the lyrics and the animal sacrifice, seem to play an important role in what we may consider as a passage from an everyday “normal” state to an ecstatic state. On the

other hand there have been cases when even if an individual has not participated in the parts of the ritual that precede firewalking s/he may be able to proceed successfully to the culminating phase.

The lack of the call can conversely prevent the participants from walking on fire. It is the task of the chief Anastenaris to ensure that no accident happens. Danforth narrates the case of Keti, an inexperienced participant in Saint Helen, that the Archianastenaris was leading “away from the fire and guiding around the outside of the bed of coals” so that she does not walk on them ¹⁸. As I have already mentioned in Chapter One, in the present thesis I am using the description around the coals instead, because while providing us with almost the same amount of information it is much simpler. The distinction between the two kinds of activities, that could also be termed as merely dancing (around the coals) as opposed to walking (on the coals) is necessary here.

Babis Papadopoulos’ interview concerning his personal experience constitutes an additional proof that it is not only the inexperienced participants who (should not and) normally do not walk. This, as he told me, can also happen to experienced ones, like himself. Babis Papadopoulos has been participating in the ritual since 2004, having also been assigned one of the key offices, that consists in carrying the sacrificial animal on his shoulders from its owner’s house to the *konaki*, where the sacrifice takes place. I am using the word assigned because during my visits in Langadas I observed a not always explicit hierarchy, in the form of the different functions each participant would serve.

In the case of Babis Papadopoulos the reason that convinced me that he had been assigned an office was that the women who were around him after he took the

animal onto his shoulders focused their attention on him; they gave him to drink, to eat and they praised him in a way that seemed to go beyond spontaneous reaction. Their attention moreover ceased after he had accomplished this act 19. Kakouri also suggests that the responsibilities taken over by what she – in her effort to underline what she was sure to be the Dionysiac origin of the ritual – calls an initiate are not random, but rather inherited and in that way assigned to them 20.

In a certain sense that will be explained in the pages that follow walking and dancing may be linked to thinking about performing for the stage: returning to the stage in the hope that you or the actor you will witness will walk on it. S/he will not just walk around it, mechanically repeating movements and text, no matter the extent to which s/he will manage to do so in the end. Returning to the stage as if the ideal will happen, making an irrational leap of faith as Kierkegaard suggests 21.

Walking on Stage: the Actor

The examination of some analogies and differences between the Anastenaria ritual performance and aspects of performing for the stage will be part of what follows. However, the actor, whose role is still absolutely necessary within a theatrical performance, will offer the starting point and the main topic. I am referring to the professional actor, because this term implies the mastery of – or at least the conscious attempt to master – a technique, something that is not necessary for the amateur actor and that forms an important part of this Chapter's argument.

Secondly, by professional stage actor I mean the actor who has trained at a drama school and participates in a professional theatrical performance. Her/his role – the one within the theatrical performance but also the professional one that

distinguishes her/him from other theatre practitioners – is often mentioned in a contract or/and a show's programme/flyer, reviews, CVs, websites and different forms of written documentation. This documentation confirms her/his professional identity which differs from others that may partake in a theatrical production, such as the producer, the director, the assistant director, the sound designer, the lighting designer, the set designer, the stage manager etc.

The term “actor” is questioned by practitioners who are critical towards Conservatoire training and/or give new names to what they do and by practices that also involve other kinds of professional engagement – the actor/director, the actor/assistant director, the actor/playwright in a collective creation, the actor who is also a member of the audience, the dancer/singer/actor that are necessary for and implied by the label musical theatre actor, or the actor who takes part in a live art performance. Nevertheless it is still a prevailing part of the theatrical terminology.

The stage actor belongs to a trade that has been characterised by Giorgio Strehler, as the “most terrible and the most beautiful trade in the world”²². Perhaps part of the actor's terribleness and beauty has to do with moments s/he is not mechanically repeating, dancing on stage. On the contrary, it has to do with moments of walking, when the witness may forget that theatre is a trade in the first place. What follows will be a list of traits that, together, might render the ‘fiery actor’ metaphor more palpable.

By this metaphor I am not referring to what Stanislavski has called “stage charm”, which, for him, makes the actor permit himself anything – even bad acting²³. I am not referring to what Joseph Roach calls “It”, as I am not investigating the imposition of an actor's charismatic personality that may result in stardom²⁴.

However, charisma may be in dialogue with this metaphor. I am also not talking about a sort of epiphany I had while witnessing the Anastenarides walk on fire that made me think “This, and nothing else, is what acting should be like”. At the difference of existing stage actors, my fiery actor is not and does not aspire to become a living creature. However, s/he eventually might offer some additional tools or keys to my efforts as a co-performer witness on stage and, hopefully, to those of others 25.

What I will try to trace are some particular moments in the work of many actors that eventually can be part of but also go beyond their craft and given conditions of work and the possibility to discover links with existing and/or forgotten practices in theatrical performances in as much as I have been able to frame them for the reader 26.

The Fiery Actor Metaphor

The Metaphor

What I am investigating here is a tentative progress towards an analogy in the field of acting 27. In order to do so I will use a metaphor I have coined, following the example of other people trying to express their ideas concerning ritualistic or theatrical performance. For instance, to cite just an example from a wide range of writers, Dan Rebellato in his essay “When We Talk of Horses, Or, what do we see when we see a play?” 28. In this essay Rebellato refers to perceiving and imagining as two “epistemically distinct activities with entirely different kinds of objects” 29. My metaphor concerning what I call the ‘fiery actor’ relates both to imagination and perception. The phrasing, the wording is a construction of my imagination, inspired by the word firewalker. However, a few substances, in the sense of characteristics,

particularities of this construction, are based on things observed by me in everyday life – as both non-theatrical and theatrical – and in that sense ‘perceived’.

The ‘fiery actor’ is not a living actor but what I would rather call a metaphor based on moments of performers’ lives. It cannot be the portrait of this or that actor because no actor that I know could permanently be in a situation like the one I will describe. The question my fiery actor is trying to bring forth is that of performing when it relates to what I will qualify – at least for the time being – as an ecstatic state having to do with: overcoming or eventually channelling fear by using one’s technique/craft as well as something that although it remains related to technique and craft eventually goes beyond it.

The definition I have just proposed certainly requires some clarifications. First of all, my limited personal experience as well as discussions with more experienced people indicate that fear is not something an actor is always eager or capable to admit s/he feels. In fact very often it may remain unconscious. An actor preparing to “walk on stage” might use other words, such as anguish, uncertainty, perplexity, emptiness or even a kind of nervous hilarity. Yet, despite the diversity of the terms, I believe that behind the majority of such expressions one can detect fear of eventual rejection.

Excitement and thrill are some other feelings, not necessarily foreign to fear, that an actor can experience. Such terms indicate that the emotional charge one can experience, once s/he is on stage, may follow either a negative or a positive course or – to use a more simple expression – that fear can eventually prove to be, once channelled in the right way, part of the creative force of the actor. In case such observations of mine happen to have a more general value, the fiery actor should be someone able to control and channel such forces towards a creative direction 30.

The expression of Karolos Koun, creator and artistic director of the Greek Art Theatre, according to which (good) acting changes the rhythm of the heartbeats, corresponds to such a difference between acting and other, less demanding, or altering human activities ³¹. However, one cannot be sure whether fear and the overcoming/utilisation of fear are always central in such a change.

Moreover an actor cannot detect with absolute certainty the precise causes that can make her/his fear or other feelings emerge. Some stimuli, like the presence of the audience or critics, the feeling of competition, the will for success and the possibility of failure can rather easily be detectable. Others may have to do with the subconscious or with things happening in each human organism and influencing the feelings (for example digestion, indigestion, or sleeplessness). In this area already we may suppose that things felt by the actor might be connected with what we call the return of the repressed, either by the bias of a conscious regression or by the emergence of a symptom.

Moreover, in the case of a theatrical performance one can detect other factors too. One of them is the relation of the actor to the text – a special kind of text that may contain the playwright's direct or implicit stage directions. The relation to her/his colleagues while on stage; the director's demands; the information produced by the dramaturg on the political and social situation of the moment under examination. All these create a kind of a hypertext – different yet comparable to the one that is detectable at the Anastenaria – containing thoughts connected to feelings that the actor is called to decipher and translate into breath, speech, movement.

I am using the following mediated incident as an example of the fiery actor's first trait: her/his – either successful or unsuccessful – relation to an ecstatic state.

The Hamlet Incident

Daniel Day-Lewis walked off the stage of the National Theatre in London in 1989, when he was playing the leading part in *Hamlet*. The actor had problems with his character's conversations with the character of the ghost of his dead father. On September 5th, about 45 minutes into the 4-hour play, he walked off, slumping in tears to the floor backstage and declaring that he could not go on. He was replaced by Ian Charleson. In the case of the world-renowned actor, the media commented on the event expressing feelings of surprise ³².

Years after this incident the actor discussed the motives for his act. Here is an excerpt from Lewis's interview with Simon Hattenstone ³³:

Interviewer: Fair enough, there is pleasure, but there must be plenty of pain; after all, few actors scour their soul like you do.

Daniel Day-Lewis: To this day, it's the reason why most of the British press apparently choose to believe that I'm stone mad. It's the sum of it all; the stuff I said as a kid, the way I work, the Hamlet incident...

The interviewer: So what did happen?

Daniel Day-Lewis: I had a very vivid, almost hallucinatory moment in which I was engaged in a dialogue with my father... yes, but that wasn't the reason I had to leave the stage. I had to leave the stage because I was an empty vessel. I had nothing in me, nothing to say, nothing to give. I depleted myself to the point where I had nothing left.

The interviewer: In a way, I say, perhaps it was the pinnacle of your career; the ultimate achievement?

Daniel Day-Lewis: An ecstasy? All I can say is that it was inexorable in both the spiritual and physical sense, because at least three stage managers tried to push me back on stage, and I had the strength of 10 men.

Despite the fact that the journalist calls the above incident the "pinnacle" of Daniel Day-Lewis's career, hallucination and ecstasy are terms one should be careful when deploying in relation to an actor's craft, as they do not necessarily enrich it. As

in the distinguished actor's case, they may rather threaten it instead. I would like to underline a passage of the interview which will eventually occupy me later on in this chapter. It is worth noting that the actor is saying he was "engaged in a dialogue with his father". If we read the text of the interview literally, we see that he is not referring to the part of Hamlet's Father or to the actor interpreting it, but to his father. Whether we would like to spell the word with a capital F or not, there is a subtle play of passing from the textual to the real and the symbolic.

Theatre is dominated by rules. One of them, a compulsory one, says that the actor having signed a contract stays on stage and does his job, acting, for the necessary time. Rules are not, however, merely based on documents such as contracts. They are also rooted in what we may call the myth or narration of the origin of the theatrical art, a narration full of fathers, protector Saints and martyrs, who are kin to the protector Saints of the Anastenaria. Aeschylus and Euripides who were forced into a self-imposed exile from Athens, Aristophanes who was condemned to pay a huge amount of money for insulting the demagogue Cleon, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, who practically died on stage, while interpreting *Le malade imaginaire*, Giorgio Strehler whose coffin lay in state on stage at the Piccolo Teatro. According to the rule imposed on theatre by "fathers" and "Saints" the actor does not abandon the stage and sometimes dies while on duty.

One could stress some striking evidence towards the formation of an analogy between the interview given to me by Babis Papadopoulos, the Anastenaris who does not walk on the burning coals when "he does not feel it" and the renowned actor who left the stage, because he felt like an empty vessel, although, just a few minutes later,

when the stage managers tried in vain to make him return to the stage, he felt that he possessed “the strength of ten men.”

They both seem to have expressed a kind of disobedience to the rules: “an Anastenaris should walk on burning coals once he has already conquered this capacity”, “an actor should continue being on stage until the end of his performance – and also keep returning to it until the end of his contract.” Yet the rules in the case of the ritual performance are at the same time more immutable and more flexible, while those which the actor is supposed to obey are partly dictated by the show business management machine.

The Hamlet incident presents some further evidence for an analogy between the firewalker and the actor. It offers a proof of the necessity for both to be like what Barba calls “a nuclear reactor,” or what other theatre practitioners have called, using less romantic notions, “resistance” or “restraint”³⁴. The firewalker or the actor must not lack energy or let her/his energy be suppressed by fear or other factors. At the same time s/he “cannot uncontrollably release all his energies, or this would lead to a catastrophe from the point of view of theatrical [or in the case of the firewalker, of ritualistic] discipline: in other words, a psychodrama” with negative if not catastrophic results. “He [Barba’s subject is the actor, I am suggesting the addition of the firewalker] must hold back the flood, build a dam”³⁵.

Control, in the sense of a dam, an equilibrium seems to be what the Hamlet incident was lacking, as possibly all the actor’s energies were released, using Barba’s terminology. Control, in the sense of a dam, an equilibrium is also necessary in the case of the firewalker. It seems to be partly ensured by the *semadi*, the red scarf that marks her/his participation, meaning also her/his agreement with a series of rules.

Daniel Day-Lewis made a distinction between being “an empty vessel” – interpreted here as the outcome of the release of all his energies – and the “very vivid, almost hallucinatory moment” he experienced on stage. Stopping his performance was possibly the result of an ecstatic state that went wrong. The actor lost control. I would like to underline here that such state does not necessarily mean loss of control

36.

Yet the question that arises is whether an ecstatic state experienced by Lewis led him to trespass not only his obligations to the rules of the show business but also those dictated by theatrical practice. The stage actor who participates in a professional theatrical performance has to be present at a specific space at a specific time. Furthermore, one of the main demands posed by directors is for the actor to be present. Here and now. How, is s/he not present? S/he is present, look, s/he is on stage, other people can see her/him too and s/he can confirm the same. Of course reference is being made to two different kinds of presence, as there is more to acting than being physically present on stage. What are the elements that this “more” consists of?

Brigid Panet’s recently published view on the actor’s daily life and the life of the imagination that belongs to a long history of discussion and practice including Stanislavski, Nemirovich-Dantchenko, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold, Grotowski, Brecht, Barba, Strasberg and many others can help us reflect on the matter 37:

To clarify the shift from the actor’s daily life to his creative life, I use this analogy: my right arm represents my daily life (note that I have not called this my ‘real’ life, because both aspects of my life are real). My left arm, nearer my heart, represents the life of the imagination, which I use for acting. Both arms connect through the centre of my body and at times can work together, though usually one is more active than the other. When I decide to move from one function to another, from my daily life to the

life of the character in the scene, it is a natural change of focus from, as it were, the right arm to the left; then, when the exercise or scene ends, I change back again.

According to Brigid Panet, in order to perform an actor has to leave behind her/his daily life and enter the life of her/his imagination. S/he is of course the same person and both her/his lives are real, but on stage, apart from being physically present, s/he also needs to be present in a different way. To start with a first level of reading Panet one could suggest that the actor needs to be present in the life of her/his imagination, or “in the moment,” in the here and now of the stage that includes its ethics, its context, its politics and its conventions; in any case on a somehow specific level. However, this presence in the life of her/his imagination cannot be reduced to something that is opposed to everyday life. As Alan Read suggests:

The premise is that everyday life must be pushed aside for theatre to occur. The opposite is true. Everyday life must be known, and intimately, for good theatre to happen. 38

I will be using the word presence for this specific yet ill-defined kind of an actor’s presence. As Schechner suggests, a performer’s presence, in the sense mentioned above – that I am choosing to interpret for the sake of my hypothesis as also his use of this word in the following excerpt – is something vital:

On the other hand, a very old man who, I was told, was the village’s chief “devil dancer” executed a few steps and sang a chant to the full appreciation of a very loud crowd. The old man had no skills in the usual theatrical sense, but was thought to have “power”, and was deeply respected, even feared, for this. His presence rather than his theatrical ability got attention. 39

One of the basic questions that the metaphor of the ‘fiery actor’ may raise for us is that of some kind of ecstatic state. The presence and the possible meaning of inspiration used in a particular sense where it would acquire not only intellectual but also emotional and corporeal aspects could also be related to such a state of consciousness of the actor 40. Several passages in theatrical tragic texts like *The*

Bacchae relate to the Dionysiac rituals, such as the phenomena of feeling different and seeing differently ⁴¹: now you see what you should see, “νὺν ὁρᾷς ἃ χρὴ σε ὁρᾶν” says Dionysus to Pentheus who is already the victim of hallucinations caused by the god, during what has been considered as “a ritual with bad outcome” (at least bad for the Theban tyrant that yields to the god’s power only because he is forced to).

This “seeing” concerns the plot of the play. At the same time, Dionysus’s ironic comment on Pentheus’s hallucinations may acquire a second meaning too. As Euripides has underlined again and again, in *Ion*, *The Bacchae*, *The Phoenician Women*, and *Helen*, theatre is offering the audience and the *polis* (city-state) the capacity to see what will otherwise remain unseen. As Shakespeare does in *Hamlet* and other plays, Euripides speaks of theatre when speaking in theatre, his characters thus becoming the mask of the playwright himself.

With the notion ecstatic state I am adopting Erika Bourguignon’s suggestion that such states belong to a continuum including various phenomena:

Thus, although our concerns here are primarily with trance and possession trance, it is worth noting that related phenomenon of REM sleep dreaming which is also a state of altered consciousness and also frequently ritualised. When we enlarge the scope of our investigation in this way, we find that we are dealing not simply with an opposition between trance and possession trance but, indeed, with two high points on a continuum. ⁴²

To elucidate such a range of phenomena the oppositions rational/irrational or even conscious/unconscious might prove to be misleading. Consciousness is not excluded from this continuum (of altered states of consciousness). The umbandists’ categorisation mentioned by Esther Pressel corroborates my assumption:

First, it is interesting to note that umbandists categorise trance, or more accurately mediums, into three types-conscious, semiconscious and unconscious. Informants

estimated that only 15 to 35 percent of Umbanda mediums are unconscious during possession. 43

The question of what the notion of an ecstatic state includes will be partially answered and partially remain in suspense throughout this investigation. However, as several theorists, directors and actors have claimed, starting with Shakespeare himself in Hamlet's directions to the actors who are going to interpret *The Mousetrap* – and as I have witnessed and experienced myself – inspiration, emotion, pathos do not exclude consciousness which might also eventually reinforce them.

It is possible for both the stage actor and the firewalker to experience an ecstatic state. However, the two kinds of experience differ in many aspects. Plato in *Phaedrus* made a meaningful distinction between the blessing of madness on one hand and the curse of morbid madness on the other, a distinction to which E. R. Dodds drew the attention of Hellenists and psychoanalysts back in 1951 44.

Plato makes a further useful distinction between the ritual madness and the poetic one. The territory of Dionysus, god of madness and theatre, is thus divided into two and this makes sense if we consider that the objectives, the time, the space and the conditions in which those two creations of human societies evolve differ. A ritual performance may have as an objective the cure of madness, or certain forms of psychic problems, by the induction of a temporary and controlled “madness” or, to be more accurate, an ecstatic state. The healing by theatrical performance, if and when such a healing is at stake, is of another kind. It operates at another level, more difficult to define. However, it is more clearly, more directly connected with the imagined and/or realized community of the polis or the modern societies and does not remain basically limited to the community of the participants, who are the people that count for the Anastenaria 45.

Forgetting Oneself/Uniting with the Universe and Technique

Where can the flow of energy lead the actor, when efficiently controlled? How can it be efficiently controlled? Let us now re-examine some aspects of the dialogue between an ecstatic state and technique.

A successful participation in the Anastenaria is thought by the participants to create some kind of union that, without neglecting the participants' community, goes beyond it – towards broader/superior forces. This will be discussed in detail in Chapters Four, Five and Six. The practice of acting, although obeying different rules, sometimes involves being totally present in the life of the scene, or/as well as in the life of imagination.

This state was described by leading Greek actress Katia Gerou, in one of the interviews she gave me, as forgetting oneself and uniting with the universe ⁴⁶. This unison, according to her, might not be the result of technique only. However, it is not something that is opposed to technique. She describes it as the technique's desired outcome. When I asked her whether this "oblivion of oneself and unison with the universe" is some sort of mysterious moment that cannot be achieved through technique, Katia Gerou sustained that more and more over the years of an actor's career, this state is not left to luck, but can be achieved through a kind of mathematical thought.

This reference of an artist to mathematics might surprise ⁴⁷. What I read under her phrasing is that this state can be the result of craftsmanship, but also can sometimes be left to luck. It is not always achieved, even from experienced actors. This "forgetting oneself" is not something easy, and it might sometimes prove to be

something dangerous, problematic, as the Lewis/Hamlet incident mentioned above indicates. It is also a proof that what is most desired by the actor, entering the life of her/his imagination, even the “peak” moment of forgetting oneself and uniting with the universe, has its limits.

One may suggest that such limits are not just given, external rules, but constitute a dynamic part of theatrical creation. Nevertheless I have the feeling that her reference to results that can be mathematically calculated is something more than a metaphor. Psychoanalysts influenced by structuralism, especially Lacan, have insisted on the mathematical organisation of the subconscious 48. The geometric rendering of the psyche is something that has occupied thinkers and artists from the times of the Greeks – especially Plato – to the twentieth century avant-gardes 49.

The state that Gerou describes can be compared to what Papadopoulos described as “emptying,” and Mahairopoulou as “euphoric.” I would like to maintain that this “emptiness” is synonymous to “forgetting oneself.” In both cases one ceases to think about oneself: how one looks, what one ate today, what one has to do tomorrow, who is watching, what people will say about one’s performance after it ends, and is concentrated on the here and now that is part of the everyday but also has an extra element to it – probably being akin to what has been named “extra-daily” by Barba 50.

The question of rules in such states is at the same time crucial and enigmatic. Emptiness has acquired a double meaning. It can denote the frustrating/tormenting absence of inspiration or the momentary eclipse of a given ‘know how’ permitting the emergence of some new knowledge, the transitory absence of given rules that will permit the creation of others. As it has been previously stated, one has to follow

certain rules, whether they apply to ritual or to theatrical performance, although the relation to such rules is not identical in both cases.

What one cannot be sure that one will follow, though, because some parts of the human mind are not that easily mastered by the mind itself, is entering this particular state: walking on fire in the case of the Anastenaris and walking on stage: being totally present on stage, forgetting oneself and “uniting with the universe” – in the case of the actor. These moments cannot be demanded for they cannot be guaranteed.

Let us now try to develop a little further the idea we have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, namely that some links can be found between the performer’s total presence on a specific level that implies an ecstatic state and the element of fear.

Aspects of Fear in the Anastenaria

The challenge of walking on burning coals is very clearly the first cause for fear. Witnesses are probably attracted because of the subconscious fear they experience when seeing the fire. They also feel the intense heat that is produced by coals. The Anastenarides, either those who merely dance or those who are going to walk, show on the other hand no visible reactions betraying fear during any of the Anastenaria practices. From what I have observed until now, whatever struggle with fear may be happening in them allows no sign to be visible to a witness.

However, the participants’ fear might also have other roots. Fear, first of all, is never merely caused by material reasons. As Bachelard suggests, it is not only the actual risk of getting burnt that will prevent a child from touching fire ⁵¹. The threat of a blow can lead somebody to panic, although the material effects of the blow might

be unimportant. This is due to a whole network of memories of painful past events, fantasies connected to violence etc. that exist in the subconscious. Painful events can also be traced in the collective subconscious of the Anastenarides' community and this can become evident if we recollect the popular myth concerning Kosti, the place of origin as discussed in Chapter One: the Anastenarides, when facing the fire and the burning coals might at the same time be "seeing," imagining, or be in "dialogue" with another fire.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the Greek Anastenarides as well as the Bulgarian Nestenari agree that their place of origin, the village of Kosti near the Black Sea, was attacked and burnt down. One version of the popular myth has it that the Kostilides (meaning the people of Kosti) were miraculously saved from the flames because of the intervention of the Saints Constantine and Helen. They passed through the flames holding the Saints' icons. This event is among the elements that return, the elements that are being ritually repeated in the Anastenaria in every place they are celebrated.

Alf Hiltebeitel in his two volume book on the Draupadi firewalking rituals ⁵², which occur in several places in India, mentions similar miraculous salvations from Turkish or Mongol invasions, as the mytho-historical reasons for the ritual. In any case the myth and the fantasy of the invasion, with all the corporeal, emotional and social/historical connotations it can acquire, offers an instrument in order to view the question of fear at the Anastenaria in a more complex way.

There is however another kind of fear that can be traced in what the members of the community say to visitors and what one may know from other sources too, such as the Greek mass media. The Anastenarides are at the same time popular, chased by TV journalists and the press, and excluded. Even if they insist that they are faithful

Orthodox Christians, they are considered as heretics by the Orthodox Church. The question of the mixture of pagan and Christian elements and the supposed passage from the ancient Dionysiac religion to Christianity is a very complex one and has only partly been discussed in this thesis for reasons mentioned in Chapter One. Yet it is clear that the Church considers the Anastenaria as something dangerous and in many ways tries to obstruct it, several times with the complicity of the local authorities, who, however, in other cases attend the firewalking.

In a few words, the Anastenarides are both central and marginal, respected and feared by the Greek society and especially the local society of Langadas. This marginalisation and partial exclusion is a cause of a fear the participants tend to conceal from visitors. However, it is expressed through non-official information they exchange between them, when they face problems such as the prohibition of the bull sacrifice for so-called “hygienic reasons” 53. This fear can possibly be linked to some other kind of persecution, hidden in even older memories which are connected to religious motives.

In any case, this marginal/central position of the participants presents an analogy with the secular condition of the actor in Europe and elsewhere. Greek as well as English dramatists were at the same time central and marginal for their societies. The same can apply to the French actors up to the nineteenth century as well as to the Hindu actors of the Kutiyatam theatrical genre, considered by some scholars to originate from the bastards of the Brachmin upper caste 54.

Overcoming Fear in the Theatre

The theatre actor is not walking on burning coals, but on the floor of the stage. Yet fear is by no means absent from her/his experience. Fear is something that works with “masks,” not letting us realize what its real face and substance is. Those “masks” can appear like laughing faces, or, in other words, there is a kind of humour and a kind of laughter that, among other things, conceals and betrays fear. Fear is present on the stage of the theatre as well as on the stage of the ritual, passing unnoticed from one stage to the other.

Fear moves from within, from the interior of the performer, as well as from outside: one must keep in mind that the actor is from a social point of view a kind of a beggar prince, always on a razor’s edge, placed between adoration and rejection and/or indifference. Casting calls asking for outgoing black or mixed-race female actors, tall, curvy, strikingly attractive, aged between twenty and thirty, to which not only female but also male actors of any race, age and bodily proportions may end up applying, perhaps diminish the romanticism of the above statement.

Like what old tales tell us about some magic or supernatural powers, fear can first appear under an almost innocent disguise. The actor, the theatre-maker, is often full of fear before the performance – this fear is also called “stage fright” and discussed extensively by theatre thinkers such as Nick Ridout ⁵⁵. However, I am choosing not to use “stage fright” but the more general “fear in theatre,” as referring not only to the actor’s experience off or on stage but also to other aspects of theatrical performances in as much as I have been able to frame them for the reader.

The actor is told by the director or the acting coach that fear is caused by repressed energy that must be transformed into successful acting. People connected in one way or another with theatrical or artistic creation often have dreams, or nightmares, where they experience the typical fear of not remembering the text they are going to interpret. When they have such dreams, they empty of any text, of any word that they should remember and transmit to the public. They also, like the actor who quits the stage, experience something close to the “*soucis de la toile blanche*,” in other words the fear of the white page that, as Mallarme first stated, torments writers and painters ⁵⁶. Such type of dream in the case of the stage actor seems linked to the anxiety of remembering and interpreting a text and the fear of rejection in case one forgets.

Reasons for the actor’s fear can appear multifarious. They have to do with the public, to whom her/his acting is addressed, with her/his fellow actors, the director and the real or symbolic critic waiting in the darkness ready to judge and, eventually, condemn. They can have to do with specific persons, present or absent, invested with a particular symbolic power. They can also have to do with theatrical texts to be interpreted, or the ones that are “forgotten” in dream.

Remembering the texts and interpreting them is part of the theatrical rules which an actor must obey in order to be an actor, especially in the speaking of what Artaud called the masterpieces. Such texts are meant to become body, soul, acting right from the beginning. And they are full of references to fear, references that must generate acting.

Although the subject has not yet become central for scholars perhaps misguided by the classical ideal of supposed Greek harmony and calm, fear is central in all

tragedies as well as in several ancient comedies. The definition of tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics* offers a first proof, but just one look at *The Oresteia* or *The Bacchae* can convince us further. Elizabethan drama from Marlowe to Shakespeare and the Jacobean Webster may offer equally convincing examples of the omnipresence of fear in theatrical texts, and modern creation such as the key texts of Ibsen, Strindberg and others or avant-garde scripts like *The Cenci* by Artaud are equally convincing in this. From the story of Agamemnon's and Oedipus's family, to that of Caesar's and Hamlet's, or the Alving and the Cenci families, fear appears to be linked to the presence or the absence of the archetypal figures of the Father and the Mother.

For the actor fear emanating from the enactment of texts is something s/he has to deal with whatever means s/he possesses, her/his mind and her/his body, her/his inspiration and her/his technique, in the given and restricted space and time of a rehearsal or a performance. Remembering or forgetting the text – the text of the play but also the “text” created by the director and the “text” created by the actor – losing or gaining control of it, in a struggle where fear seems always directly or indirectly present, seems even more important than in the case of the Anastenarissa forgetting the words of the songs that make up part of the ritual performance, as the reader will see in Chapter Four.

When an Anastenarissa or an Anastenaris is walking on fire, s/he is not getting burnt and s/he is not in pain – neither aiming at nor experiencing pain; s/he is beyond risk and fear. The ‘fiery actor,’ like the firewalker, tames the fear that fire – What could fire stand for here? The moment of creation? The stage? Being present? Being “in the moment”? Being “exposed”? Acting? Could ‘fire’ in that case be seen as both

an obstacle and a practical means of battling fear? – can provoke, by walking on it.

S/he walks on fear. S/he walks on fire. S/he walks on stage.

On Being Empty and a “Double” of the Theatre

Babis Papadopoulos, the firewalker, walks or does not walk, overcomes or does not overcome the fear fire causes, according to whether or not he has received the call of the protector Saint. For him “being empty” does not mean lack of inspiration, but on the contrary disappearance of all thoughts and feelings that would function as obstacles forbidding him to accomplish the task 57:

Interviewer: Could you describe to me what happens to you when you walk?

Babis: You empty, that is how I would describe it. I empty. I do not know where all that goes.

The famous actor felt “empty” at a different yet somehow similar moment. Did he also receive a call, the call of the netherworld? The call of the Ghost which is the ghost of the father? We know that, according to Craig’s famous essay “The Ghosts in the Tragedies of Shakespeare”, speaking with the ghost of the father means placing the play on the right level, at least the level considered as right by the author of the essay and protagonist of the theatrical avant-garde of the beginning of the twentieth century 58. What Daniel Day-Lewis did offers us the possibility to re-examine the question of inspiration and in a broader sense the question of obeying and/or breaking the rules. It also reintroduces the questions of what is the relation between theatrical and ritualistic performance, and, in a way, of what is and what is not theatre.

It is a commonplace that the twentieth century avant-gardes, including Craig, Artaud, Beck and Malina, Grotowski, Barba, have in various ways and with varying arguments tried to break with what they thought to be the bourgeois theatrical

tradition and to bring back theatre to its ritual origins 59. What they were striving for was the ideal that theatre should be something more than business, trade, technical know-how etc. What they have so many times been accused of is that they have produced few convincing concrete theatrical works, or, worse, that what they did, although it contained enriching experiences, was practically no theatre at all 60.

The effort to transform the theatrical community, mainly composed of the two inseparable halves of stage and auditorium, into a ritualistic community, seemed, according to such critics, to be anti-historical or even politically dangerous. Theatre had, after all, emerged in Greece and other places in straight dialogue with the polis, the community not of initiates but citizens, represented in the theatre by spectators. The proposed return to the ritual status, even if it was to succeed, would prove to be an artistic and political regression.

Such criticism seems pertinent to me. Yet the fascination with this other kind of theatre related to a different kind of consciousness of the actor persists and this could be due to several factors. The first one is that the dream or the fantasy of another theatre, a double of the theatre impregnates in various ways not only people claiming that they belong to the avant-gardes, but also playwrights, directors, actors who are often characterised as belonging to what we might call the theatrical mainstream 61.

Another reason is that what we used to call theatrical mainstream is changing dramatically. The texts, including what Artaud called the masterpieces, seem to have lost something of their omnipotence. Non-textual theatre, physical theatre, devised theatre, performance art as well as other genres that claim a more or less straight relation to ritual performance, are some of the alternative genres that coexist with text-based theatre, which, despite everything, is far from disappearing. Mastery of

technique and application of the rules are always dominant, sometimes more so in kinds of theatre that had promised their extinction.

However, the quest for another approach, including some kind of connection with something beyond the present theatrical community, often becomes part of the experience of many actors. The ‘fiery actor’ metaphor is a tool to investigate this field created by the tensions not only between ritualistic and theatrical performance but also between the various contrasting visions of theatre, visions that are often present in the same person.

Character/Person

One could better trace the border which constitutes the one possible end of the itinerary that a theatre-maker or thinker could possibly accomplish, and that is rendered here by the metaphor of the ‘fiery actor,’ by reflecting on the kind of performer Schechner refers to:

The kind of performer that I am talking about – like the Shaman, Artaud’s martyr, and Grotowski’s Cieslak – discards the buffer of “character.” [...] Each performance he risks freshly not only his dignity and craft, but his life-in-process. 62

Reference to the leading ideas of the twentieth century revolution against the mainstream theatre forces us to address the character-person question. Right from the beginning of its use in Greek language the term character (χαρακτήρ) refers to something that is carved, *charassetai* (χαράσσεται), like the figure of a king is engraved on a metal coin or a seal. It therefore refers to something stable in the sense that it is quite well designed and delimited. The conception of a theatrical role, let us say the conception one may have about the role of Antigone, Hamlet or Lady Macbeth, as indivisible entities almost independent of the rest of the play, was one

characteristic of the theatre of the protagonist towards which the attacks of Craig, Artaud etc. were aimed.

The concept of person, *prosopon* (πρόσωπον) in ancient drama seems to be a more dynamic and flexible one. Its understanding and interpretation can be achieved only in dialogue with the rest of the play including the choral odes. The acting should better not spring from an external idea concerning the isolated character but from the reaction to the text in its evolution.

The avant-gardes attacked the concept of character from another point of view. The actor of Grotowski should not try to act and his main concern should instead be to live. Real life, illuminated by ritual, should become theatre's new objective and ideal. In this case one should not think of the character any more but of the real living person.

However, what I call here the 'fiery actor' could not and probably should not be a real person. S/he cannot be a whole, cannot form a continuum – and therefore could not be a living person, as Grotowski's ideal actor, Cieslak. In contrast, the way in which we can consider the "fiery actor," can be her, or his, experience of a state of consciousness that can last as long as a lightening lasts, or as long as it takes for a forest fire to be put out. S/he is not a given – as a person who exists and, in that sense, is not a negotiable notion – but rather a gift – in the sense that these moments may be a gift both to the stage actor and to her/his audience.

This metaphor can refer to a transitory period of time, even if one cannot exclude that this period could last for a very long time, as some people have come to develop a kind of capacity permitting them to experience something like a permanent passage to

controlled ecstasy. Such was, for example, according to the painter himself, the case of Salvador Dali, speaking in his *Oui*, about his state of critical paranoia 63.

Internal Rules and Being Able to Walk on Stage

Passage into an ecstatic state seems, as stated above, to exclude any obedience to external rules and conventions connected to an artistic and more precisely theatrical activity. The case is, however, far more complicated. Even some of the professional actors sometimes break established rules and on the other hand, when they do so they may obey to some other more profoundly rooted rules that exist at the borders between consciousness and the unconscious. Those internal rules dictate the actor's relationship with the theatre as both artistic expression and trade, with her/his colleagues and with the public. On the other hand, disobedience to external rules for the sake of an internal discipline can be paralleled to the dynamic behaviour of the participant to the *Anastenaria* and other ecstatic rituals and eventually to the particular state of the performer that I investigate using the metaphor of the 'fiery actor.'

This last case, however, is not as clear as it may seem. 'Ecstasy' itself, ritualistic or other, does not necessarily include the absence of consciousness or the disobedience to rules. Furthermore, obedience to the rule can be due not to external submission but to what one could call an 'internal' one. At the end of *Antigone's* prologue Ismene tells her sister she has "a burning soul" because she disobeys what still seem to be the laws of the city, but Antigone's act means not disobedience but obedience to her inner law, which, let us remember for the sake of our ongoing discussion, is the law of fidelity to the Father and to the Mother (*Anti-gone* means "in the place of the father" in Greek).

Obeying the rule of theatre can thus prove not to be something imposed but on the contrary something achieved. I have already discussed that an important part of the rules of the theatrical institutions, the industries and the performances that a stage actor is a part of, is her/his commitment to perform in front of an audience for the amount of time that is defined by a contract or an agreement. We can now go back to another aspect of the actors' commitment, which lies between rule and tradition on one hand and personal choice on the other and whose motives have to be defined. S/he often continues performing in a show's run even when s/he is ill or in bereavement.

For Gerou, this does not only have to do with their obligation to the industry, nor with a sense of commitment to their art ⁶⁴. According to her, being able to walk on stage no matter what has happened to the actor off stage, is also one of the most life-affirming behaviours linked to this craft. I would like to sustain that in both the cases of the metaphor of the 'fiery actor' on the one hand and the firewalker on the other, as in the case of the actor described by Gerou, taking part in the event demands surpassing not only fear but also one's own physical or emotional pain.

Surpassing Pain

A concept that was put forward by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* ⁶⁵ and was used in more or less the same sense by Jan Kott in *The Eating of the Gods* ⁶⁶, was that the actor is a kind of a scapegoat or a kind of a burning torch illuminating the world of the theatre. Schechner's reading of one of Grotowski's references to Artaud offers us another bias to approach the metaphor of the 'fiery actor':

Grotowski thinks that Artaud's proclamation that "actors should be like martyrs burnt alive, still signaling through the flames" contains the "whole problem of spontaneity

and discipline, the conjunction of opposites which gives birth to the total act... [which is] the very crux of the actor's art" (Grotowski 1967: 125,123). Both spontaneity and discipline are risks for the performer. 67

How does the fiery actor relate to Grotowski's reading of Artaud's description? Through the conjunction of two opposites. The spontaneity – is it Artaud's martyrs burnt alive? – and the discipline – is it Artaud's signaling through the flames? – brings us back to what Eugenio Barba called release of energy and building of a dam.

The flow of energy and its control complement each other and have already been discussed in this chapter. There is, however, a major difference between what Artaud describes and what I am suggesting here: even if both in Artaud's metaphor and in the one that is being examined there is a reference to fire, Artaud's metaphor includes fire as torture/punishment that leads to death. Therefore it implies risk but also self-sacrifice and physical pain: like martyrs burnt alive. The difference is crucial because it refers to what in Artaud is not just a basic idea, but also perhaps a key to understand his art and life. In *The Theatre of Cruelty*, Artaud had explained that any eventual aggressiveness contained in the concept of cruelty should be understood as oriented not towards the public or society but towards the actor or the man of the theatre alone 68.

On the other hand, when an Anastenaris is walking on fire, he is not in pain, nor aiming at experiencing pain, and he is not getting burnt. He is in that sense beyond pain, as he is beyond fear. I will note here that for the moments a stage actor becomes a fiery actor, experiences a controlled altered state of consciousness and goes beyond fear, s/he also forgets about pain: her/his aim is not to experience pain but to overcome it. Therefore in my metaphor of the fiery actor physical or emotional pain should be put under control. Or remain in suspense.

Conclusions

The Imagined and the Real

In Daniel Day Lewis's case, the actor's technique did not protect him from losing control. Something happened to him on stage that forced him to go off stage. There have of course been other exceptions to the rule that dictates walking on stage no matter what has happened to the actor off (or on) stage besides his case. For example the director and actor Lefteris Voyiatzis, during a performance of *Cleansed* by Sarah Cane in Athens in 2004, stopped acting and said to the audience: "please leave, I have lost my thread of thought". The performance stopped before its end, the event becoming an ongoing subject of discussion among the Athenian artists and theatre-goers, who were caught by surprise.

As stated, there are some actors who have stopped acting during a performance, thus forming an exception to the rule, but the proof of the rule's very existence and validity lies in the reaction of the industry, the media and theatre amateurs, in the literal sense of those who love the theatre. The surprise that these events created shows that they were not expected because they went against the rule mentioned above. They were exceptions to it.

I will also note another case, concerning not a single actor, but a whole group leaving the stage in the middle of a performance. The Living Theatre, while staging its version of *Antigone* at the Avignon Festival in the summer of 1968, stopped acting in the theatre and got out to join a protest in the middle of which they started to perform again ⁶⁹. The Living Theatre, one of the most famous groups that among other things have tried to apply Artaud's ideas concerning a ritualistic theatre, had

already paid the price of their political engagement by being ostracised. Ironically enough, in May 2012 the Living Theatre would risk being evicted from its theatre, its space in New York.

The very name of the group was in a way symbolic of the act they committed in Avignon. Departing from theatre was an escape from what they considered the bourgeois world of art to the world of life and revolution. Politics was a main concern for this and other similar groups, although the harshest and probably most pertinent criticism addressed to them was precisely on the political level. Once, in Germany, they were criticised on the ground that a theatre minimising the importance of the text risked involuntarily imitating Hitler's propaganda methods. On the other hand, when the group was visiting Athens with their production of *Antigone* in the 1980s, they had tried to organise a demonstration for the liberation of the Junta colonels, maintaining that no human being should ever remain in prison.

Nevertheless, the exit from the borders of traditional theatre, and also from the borders of art in general, has been a constant concern of the twentieth century's avant-gardes in all European countries, including communist Russia of the first decades of the revolution. To abandon the world of established traditional theatre for the sake of what one feels as true art and/or life still remains a temptation haunting the actor, or other theatre artist and thinker, who has not been absorbed by routine.

One could argue that this other world is merely situated in the actor's imagination. Yet things are more complex. Part of this complexity is due to the fact that not all people – including those involved in theatre – understand imagination in the same way. With this new perspective I would like to go back to Brigid Panet's view on the actor's daily life and the life of the imagination ⁷⁰. According to her, in

order to perform, an actor has to leave behind her/his daily life and enter the life of the imagination. One should underline, however, that the actor's real imagination is here considered able to collaborate with and potentially unravel the real everyday life.

Both imagination and reality, however, are terms that can acquire many meanings, even contradictory ones, when what is at stake is an escape, or a return, to what is considered real life and real theatre. To stress the point of controversy, one could mention just the question of the different views concerning imagination, utopia and ecstatic states. What is the "reality" for one person is unsubstantial for another. Most utopian schemes, at least when they are not consciously ironic, are built on the belief that they can and must exist. And the existence, or the importance of some forces or forms of "energy," a word dear not only to Barba but also to any actor who claims to use some kind of unique language, oscillates between metaphor and reality.

The Accessories

People believing that ritual, initiation, ecstatic states and related symbolic forms are fraud or nonsense clearly do not judge them in the same way as people who, no matter whether they share such experiences or not, respect them and take them seriously. The presence of the performer is also one of the terms that can be rethought according to what opinion one holds regarding such matters.

In the case mentioned by Schechner the performer's presence was vital⁷¹. It seemed distinct from the usual theatrical skills – to the extent that one can be certain of what "usual theatrical skills" really are and whether presence can be part of an actor's "usual theatrical" technique or not. The person in question seems closer to a shaman than to an actor.

In other cases, however, the importance of the performer's presence is not something distinct from her/his theatrical ability, but rather part of it; it forms part of the actor's technique. As Nicholas Ridout writes, there are some marginal or unwanted events of the theatrical encounter:

The 'accessories' [...] are the apparently marginal or unwanted events of the theatrical encounter, that will turn out, of course, to be somehow vital to it; stage fright; embarrassment; animals; the giggles; failure in general. 72

There is something particularly useful in this approach and discussion of the actor's energy or presence as part of the concrete life of theatre instead of abstractions. Fright, embarrassment, animals, giggles can seem accessories. They even form a kind of continuum. Giggles can be the heralds of embarrassment or fear, animals can make us anxious because, as in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, they open the gate to our worst nightmares or to the dirty, inferior, bestial parts of ourselves which we were taught to hide so well that, in the end, we may not be able to witness them any more.

There seem to be some accessories that an actor has to acknowledge as constituent parts of her/his practice. Being present on stage might not be guaranteed; yet being present and being absent are both possible ingredients of the same practice. Being absent on stage, what could it mean? Not entering the play? The game? The character? The moment? One's own body? The life of one's imagination? Not walking on the coals but rather dancing around the coals as the Anastenarissa Ketī, in an attempt to protect our feet and ourselves from what will happen if?

Being absent could be understood as akin to Ridout's description of corpsing that occurs "on occasions where the self is operating with particular self-consciousness as

the agent of a discourse of discipline or control”⁷³. It is an unwanted and marginal event of the theatrical encounter, and perhaps for that reason something vital too. Corpsing could be considered as one of the extreme versions of absence - for there are less easily detectable ones.

During a performance, an actor can find herself/himself mechanically taking the steps s/he has rehearsed and knows s/he has to take, but not switching from – or rather, combining – her/his daily life, her/his daily self to the self of the stage and of the imagination. What varies is not only the duration of the process set in motion by such accessories but also the ways it manifests, its impact and the ways in which one deals with it.

The ‘Fiery Actor’ Not as a Given but as a Gift

Some actors, especially while young, may find themselves striving to put their imagination in motion, in the pursuit of strong emotions. Young people coming from cities, like some among the new generation of Greek Anastenarides, perhaps take part in the ritual performance in search for strong emotions and an encounter with an attractive world that sharply differs from what they are used to. The use of hallucinogenic substances has also been connected to this kind of quest. Theatre people of various tendencies, however, insist on the fact that neither so-called “strong” experiences, nor the feeling that one has reached a particular energy level, guarantee a “successful” aesthetic result. When this presence of energy is not subject to efficient control – as opposed to inefficient control, either inadequate or on the contrary excessive and self-restrictive – the aesthetic result may constitute a “failure.” The actor “must hold back the flood, build a dam,” while at the same time not draining the river.

Entering into such a state – becoming what I called a fiery actor – is not something that can easily fit into a set of a theatrical performance’s rules. Because entering a controlled ecstatic state with the help of technique and overcoming fear and pain, something that the fiery actor is supposed to do, is something artists, writers, thinkers, people of one or another faith may also be attempting to do, and yet out of this experience we know this is something that we have to struggle for. The fiery actor’s performance is not a given; it cannot be taken for granted; it cannot be demanded for it cannot be guaranteed. Yet returning to the Anastenaria ritual performance over the period of three years may prove useful for both its understanding and its practical use.

PART B

WITNESSING THE ANASTENARIA: CO-PERFORMANCE AND RETURNS

Chapter Four

THE ANASTENARIA THROUGH CO-PERFORMATIVE WITNESSING IN MAY 2009: MEMORY, COMMUNITY AND ELIMINATED PRACTICES

Introduction

Chapter Four uses my field research in Langadas in May 2009. The theoretical framework introduced here will be used in this Chapter and then again in Chapters Five and Six, where it will be further developed. I begin by defining my position as a researcher. I talk about the urge to pass from the state of witness to that of participant. This leads to a discussion on participant observation, through the work of anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead and ethnographically informed performance studies scholars such as Richard Schechner. I ask whether it is possible for the witness of Langadas to consciously apply Michael Taussig's suggestion of "the double action of being part of something yet distant from it, too, of being immersed in an experiential reality and being outside the experience"¹. This question leads to a discussion of Walter Benjamin's thinking on the role of memory in witnessing – memory as both nearness and habit and how it relates to a "rigorous connection between foreground and distance"².

I then describe my methodology that consists of the following elements. 1. Remembering and reimagining such rigorous connection between foreground and distance as experienced during my first visit to the village of Langadas in 2009 in order to describe this visit in Narrative One. 2. Being aware of the fact that my way of witnessing the same place and the same practices would change over these three years (2009-2011) and then allowing such awareness to be temporarily forgotten so that the reader can follow the description of my first visit "as if" I did not have the memory of the two visits that followed. 3. A working definition of the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria in 2009. 4. This leads to the question: In what way may violence relate to what is at stake at the Anastenaria? This subject is discussed via Roberto

Esposito's work on the concept of community that helps form a working definition of the Anastenaria community. For this definition I use the examples of two Anastenaria practices: firewalking and animal sacrifice. 5. The reader is then introduced to Isabelle Stengers' and Alan Read's work on eliminated practices, which provides a framework in order to address the element of change in relation to the Anastenaria: a ritual performance including some practices that have endured and others that can be considered as eliminated.

My central question of whether the Anastenaria, through which healing and survival are sought, can be considered as a surviving ritual performance, is discussed in this Chapter, through the description of my first visit in Langadas in 2009 that forms Narrative One, and the conclusions that are produced.

The Witness

The person we could call a motivated visitor to the Anastenaria ritual, as an artist or scholar perhaps, will probably ask herself/himself: "Who am I in relation to this investigation and what are my motives?"

In May 2009 I am definitely not a participant, even if I sometimes feel this impulse. For the time being, I have a different position which I feel the need to clarify. This is not an easy task due to methodological as well as psychological reasons. As a person coming from a large urban centre and having received an education largely based on critical thought as this is understood by occidental rationalism I may tend to judge everything from a point of view which resists participation 3. This attitude seeks critical distance, yet on the other hand presents the risk of completely ignoring the participant's experience.

However, already during this first visit in 2009 I had felt the urge to pass from the state of witness to that of participant. As I mentioned in Chapter One, I will be using the term “participant” to mean the person who is wearing the *semadi* (red scarf) and is therefore part of the Anastenarides group, as opposed to the “witness” who is the person that does not wear the *semadi* and is not part of the group. This distinction is being used for purposes of clarity and not in order to over-simplify the dialogue between the two terms, the witness participating and the participant witnessing.

In fact, internal participation is something that anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead and ethnographically informed performance scholars such as Richard Schechner have tried in the past following the various methods associated with participant observation. Mead participated in the living culture to record their cultural activities, focusing on specific activities, rather than participating in the activities of the culture overall as did Malinowski 4. Schechner writes in *Performance Studies: An Introduction* about performance studies practitioners who undertake three forms of activity: artistic practice, typically integrated with other modes of apprehension of the objects of study; participant observation (often of the home culture) and social intervention as the proper outcome of their investigations 5.

Jean S. Schensul and Margaret Diane Le Compte define participant observation as “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting” 6. H. Russell Bernard adds to this understanding, arguing that participant observation requires a certain amount of deception and impression management. Most anthropologists, he notes, need to maintain objectivity through distance. He defines participant observation as the

process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community so that its members act naturally, then removing oneself from the community to be able to write about it. In the process of being a participant observer he includes observation, natural conversations, interviews of various sorts, checklists, and questionnaires 7. For Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt participant observation is characterized by such actions as being a careful observer and a good listener, and being open to the unexpected in what is learned 8.

Michael Taussig comments upon the dual role of participant observation in his *What Color Is the Sacred?* as follows: “like participant observation, parody mimics so as to gain distance and insight” 9. Such participation may offer the researcher of the Anastenaria at least a parody of distance and insight, while enabling them to penetrate some aspects of the ritual performance that are known only to the participants and hidden from the other witnesses.

On the other hand, it might lead the researcher to the temptation of full integration to the group that practices the ritual and eventually focus only on what is made visible to them by the other members of the group, losing their curiosity to discover what may remain concealed. Furthermore, even if they happen to access what was previously concealed, they might not be allowed or willing to question it or communicate it in the form of narratives.

Taussig in *Walter Benjamin's Grave* writes that it is “always by means of stories” that anthropology works 10. “Anthropology is blind to how much its practice relies on the art of telling other people’s stories - badly” 11. What might the stories on the Anastenaria ritual – made of what was concealed and then revealed – reveal? What might they conceal through an “art of telling” to which anthropology is “blind”?

Could such “blindness” be prevented through an *action* when witnessing this ritual?

The same author commenting on Freud and what he singled out as the key feature of memory in psychoanalysis, describes “the double action of being part of something yet distant from it, too, of being immersed in an experiential reality and being outside the experience” 12.

In what sense would it be possible for the witness in Langadas to consciously apply such a “double action”? Benjamin offers a penetrating comment on the subject, when he talks about the role of memory in witnessing and in favour of the *nearness* memory equips the traveller with in “The Great Art of Making Things Seem Closer Together”:

The great art of making things seem closer together. In reality. Or from where we are standing; in memory. (...) This is the mysterious power of memory – the power to generate nearness. A room we inhabit whose walls are closer to us than to a visitor. This is what is homey about home. In nurseries we remember, the walls seem closer to each other than they really are, than they would be if we saw them today. The sight of them tears us apart because we have become attached to them. The great traveller is the person who passes through cities and countries with anamnesis; and because everything seems closer to everything else, and hence to him, since he is in their midst, all his senses respond to every nuance as truth. The distanced Romantic is as ignorant of this as the Positivist. 13

Benjamin also writes about memory as habit in “One-Way Street”. He relates (the inability for) distance to memory, which affects our perception of the landscape/background and what lies closer, the foreground. This time the elimination of distance seems to be experienced as a loss:

Lost-and-Found office

Articles lost.-What makes the very first glimpse of a village, a town, in the landscape so incomparable and irretrievable is the rigorous connection between foreground and distance. Habit has not yet done its work. As soon as we begin to find our bearings, the landscape vanishes as a stroke, like the façade of a house as we enter it. It has not yet gained preponderance through a constant exploration that has become habit. Once we begin to find our way about, the earliest picture can never be restored. 14

Via Benjamin such “double action” as the one described by Taussig would combine the artful retrieval of “articles lost,” the nearness to them, with the mourning for this loss.

My methodology as a co-performer witness of the Anastenaria ritual performance in 2009, adopting the way Dwight Conquergood has developed participant observation, as it has already been discussed in Chapter One, included the following elements ¹⁵. The attempt to remember (and reimagine) a “rigorous connection between foreground and distance” I experienced in 2009 in order to describe my first visit to the village of Langadas in Narrative One that follows. Of course this “rigorous connection between foreground and distance” is not always synonymous to the “first glimpse of a village,” to a first-time visit. In the case the visitors are not open, relaxed or attentive enough, for instance if something else is bothering them (such as the loss of a person or a financial or health problem), they might not have this experience. They might be lost in their own thoughts instead. They might not witness much ¹⁶.

My way of witnessing the *same* place and the *same* practices would change over these three years. The change involved, but was not limited to a shift towards the abandonment of distance for the sake of foreground – this shift, this motion is mirrored in my attempt to write about the Anastenaria as I witnessed it over the three years. Clarification: neither the space nor the practice was the same. When repeating a practice not only the time but also other details are different, these details having to do with changes in the space, in the practices, in the witnesses (their number or their attitude towards the ritual), or in the participants themselves. However, we still talk about “Langadas,” we still talk about the “Anastenaria.” These names did not change

between 2009 and 2011, nor did the structure of the ritual performance and the succession of the practices. It is in that sense I feel I can speak of them as being the same. However, in my Narrative on Langadas in 2009 that follows, being aware of the fact that my way of witnessing the same place and the same practices changed over these three years (2009-2011), I allow such awareness to be temporarily forgotten so that the reader can follow the description of my first visit “as if” I did not have the memory of the two visits that followed.

A third challenge of the Anastenaria ritual performance and co-performative witnessing, is the too easy or eager identification, in that sense the *nearness in excess* leading to a falsification of the other’s image. In his article “Performing as a Moral Act, Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance,” Dwight Conquergood reflects upon this type of identification calling it the “enthusiast’s infatuation.” The excerpt is worth quoting in full here:

Tzvetan Todorov unmasks the moral consequences of too easy and eager an identification with the other: “Can we really love someone if we know little or nothing of his identity, if we see, in place of that identity, a projection of ourselves or ideals? We know that such a thing is quite possible, even frequent, in personal relations; but what happens in cultural confrontations? Doesn’t one culture risk trying to transform the other in its own name, and therefore risk subjugating it as well? How much is such love worth?” “The Enthusiast’s infatuation,” which is also the quadrant where “fools rush in where angels fear to tread”, is neither innocent nor benign. 17

It seems that the “enthusiast’s infatuation” would not allow for the witness’s memory to be awakened. There was no time for it to be created. S/he cannot mourn the loss of memory either. Nothing has been lost. Or can be found. This warning was quite useful to me and it might be useful to other witnesses of the ritual performance in Langadas, no matter how different the reasons that bring them there are, although perhaps especially when they are researchers too. In my case, any ‘infatuation’ that may be detected by the reader, has been careful and gradual. I was aware of it and of

at least some of the ways it has affected my research. This is why, when writing about Langadas, I trusted that this careful, gradual ‘infatuation’ must form part of my methodology. That it must be detectable by the reader, inviting her/him to witness the co-performance, which places the researcher as part of the ‘object’ of this study.

Some more information that a former researcher of the Anastenaria has communicated to me corroborates the opinion that the questions of identification and enthusiasm are very delicate. Mina Machairopoulou, one of the participants, told me in a discussion that the first time she went to Langadas she wanted to conduct research on the Anastenaria. Crying, she joined the Anastenarides instead, at the same time deciding to abandon her research. Her identification with the *other* coincided with her first-time visit. She became one of them. Since then she has continued producing texts on other subjects having to do with folklore studies. Not on the Anastenaria. She has kept the roles of witnessing as a researcher and participating distinct.

The co-performer witness has to keep in mind another difference and in that sense another element of distance between her/him and at least some of the participants¹⁸. Presence or absence of curiosity constitutes a criterion underlining such difference. The participants enact their practices “because they found them that way,” as the “grandfather,” the chief Anastenaris says. The co-performer witness is curious both about the practices and the people who enact them, in order to speak about them. Or in order to speak “to and with them.” Ellen Lewin quotes Conquergood in *Out in public: reinventing lesbian/gay anthropology in a globalized world*:

Conquergood advocates that performance ethnographers performatively engage the Other “as a way to have intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them” (Conquergood 1985) 19

In order to speak about the Anastenarides in this text, the need to speak “to and with them” in the field would gradually become stronger. The dialogue would also require mutual curiosity. However, at my first visit (2009), not knowing how exactly to approach the Anastenarides, I made the decision to do so in an active way that would later seem threatening to me. In 2009 I was approaching the Anastenarides in order to ask them questions in the form of interviews, in that sense speaking “about them” from the beginning.

I adopted a “working author” role, editing the field notes and not considering them as finished 20. This has been the way the first narrative was written. It also obeys a strict chronological order – which I considered necessary in order to underline two things: the series of surprises that derived from the rigorous connection between foreground and distance in 2009 and my need as a first-time visitor to follow a step-by-step structure, wanting to give some order to what I had seen when writing about it.

I understand the “double action” when *looking* for the first time *at* (by looking at I mean here both witnessing in the field and investigating in the form of writing) the Anastenaria ritual performance that was discussed above as the elusive “rigorous connection between foreground and distance” which constitutes a need for the witness. It does not only protect someone from the traps of alienation or too eager identification with the other, but it may also underline another need: “The need to become a thing in order to break the catastrophic spell of things”: Taussig comments

upon Adorno's interpretation of the gaze of Benjamin's philosophy as: "Medusan, meaning it turned to stone whatever it looked at" 21.

What may the "catastrophic spell of things" be when discussing Langadas? Is this expression too grandiloquent when discussing a rural environment and engagement in an activity that might seem at first to be free from any danger, any spell of violence? In what way may violence relate to what is at stake here? The attempt to answer this question leads to the discussion of the concept of the Anastenaria community.

The Anastenaria Community

The use of the word is made up of some specific elements that form part of Roberto Esposito's account in *Communitas, The Origin and Destiny of Community*, in which he discusses the development of the concept of community from the perspective of its original etymological meaning: *cum munus* (translation: *cum*=together and *munus*=office/gift/burden/spectacle). Such elements will help form a working definition of the Anastenaria community for the purposes of this as well as the following Chapters.

The distinction Esposito makes between "communitas" and "immunitas," as between having to perform an office and having no office to perform is of particular interest for the purposes of the present research:

Here we find the final and most characteristic of the oppositions associated with the alternative between public and private, those in other words that contrast *communitas* to *immunitas*. If *communis* is the one who is required to carry out the functions of an office - or the donation [elargizione] of a grace - on the contrary, the term *immunis* defines the person who has to perform no office [*immunis dicitur qui nullo fungitur officio*], and for that reason he remains ungrateful [*ingratus*]. 22

The second point of particular interest of his analysis consists in his view that the “munus” shared by the *communitas* “isn’t having, but on the contrary, is a debt, a pledge, a gift that is to be given, and that therefore will establish a lack”.²³

Thirdly, I am focusing on what Esposito calls a “violent loss of borders”:

That which everyone fears in the munus, which is both “hospitable” and “hostile,” according to the troubling lexical proximity of *hospes*-*hostis* is the violent loss of borders, which awarding identity to him, ensures his subsistence.²⁴

Communitas and Immunitas

Let us now try to clarify the ways in which the above elements can help to form a working definition of the Anastenaria community. Rather simply put, this definition relates to my observation in the field of people who were performing offices together and others who did not, and the coexistence in this ritual of togetherness, acceptance, sharing, and in that sense love as well as threat, loss, persecution and in that sense violence.

First of all, I am using the division between *immunis* and *communis* as it was observed at the Anastenaria. Chapter Four, as well as Chapters Five and Six, include three narratives on the Anastenarides in Langadas and their many offices in May 2009, May 2010 and May 2011. However, the narratives focus on the offices the Anastenarides carry out not only as individuals (something that will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five) but also together, *cum* each other, while a special importance is given to the spectacular practice of firewalking – spectacle also being one of the meanings of the word *munus*.

This practice can serve as a clear example of the survival of the community through its reactivation, for the following reasons. This is an office that, as the participants have reported to me, involves the potential for uncertainty (Will I be able to walk or not?). In that sense this particular office is at risk of not being carried out, the participant turning immune not because he had no office to perform but because he has not performed it. And it is through the overcoming of this uncertainty that the common office of walking on fire (or not) together takes (or does not take) place. The overcoming of uncertainty by each individual results in the validation of a common practice.

Might this be not only an uncertainty associated with the danger of fire (in the sense that each one of the participants will only walk if they know they “have a path” which will prevent them from getting burnt) but also an uncertainty in front of community itself, of validating the community through this office of walking on fire together?

The office of firewalking is public in the sense that – at least in the present conditions and in the majority of the known cases – it takes place in front of a public, which as Michael Warner writes can stand for:

... a concrete audience, a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, as with a theatrical public. Such a public also has a sense of totality, bounded by the event or by the shared physical space. A performer on stage knows where her public is, how big it is, where its boundaries are, and what the time of its common existence is. A crowd at a sports event, a concert, or a riot might be a bit blurrier around the edges, but still knows itself by knowing where and when it is assembled in common visibility and common action. 25

This each time public shares the physical space inside and outside the *konaki* in Langadas and knows where and when it is assembled in common visibility. It consists in part of people who have or feel they have no further office to perform,

other than being members of this public. Maybe it is these people who seem indifferent or become aggressive towards the participants and towards the other witnesses. There are also people among this public, among the witnesses, who, some of them immediately and some others later on, are being assigned an office or feel they have an office: the office of walking on fire or other, lesser ones. It is these offices that make them, too, part of the community, as engaged witnesses or as candidate participants. In this sense it is only after these people become engaged at a certain level of various tasks that they can be somehow considered as part of the Anastenaria community.

Of course the Anastenarides too are required to carry out the functions of more than one office. Firewalking might be the most open to the public and spectacular – for the witnesses – as well as the most challenging – for the Anastenarides themselves – but there are many more offices the functions of which they have to carry out. If they do not carry them out, they will also turn, even momentarily, immune. One might not be able to detect it as easily though. Exactly because of it being most of the time “open to the public” and “spectacular,” firewalking is also visible to the public who in turn “know where it is, how big it is, where its boundaries are, and what the time of its ... existence is.” Because of its visibility this office can serve as the clearest example of the game between *communis* and *immunis* that forms part of the Anastenaria community as it is being discussed here. The challenge it involves is obvious in the sense that if the participant does not walk on fire the witness will see it. If the individual does not carry out this office, will s/he turn immune for the audience’s eyes and in that sense not part of the validation/reactivation of the community? This individual would still be part of the

Anastenarides' community, as it is not necessary to walk in order to be accepted by the other participants as a member.

Could therefore one argue that the Anastenaria community refers to the participants when they are being witnessed? That it requires someone who looks? This is partially the case, because the recognition and esteem of a public constitutes a shield against eventual attacks and because the witnesses might become participants. Yet, we know that the ritual has survived for long periods with no "audience" at all and that in some cases it is still being performed only among the participants themselves.

A Gift

Esposito's view that the *munus* shared by the *communitas* "isn't having, but on the contrary, is a debt, a pledge, a gift that is to be given, and that therefore will establish a lack" can be useful in interpreting the Anastenaria ritual performance. Firewalking (as it has been discussed in Chapter Three) is indeed a practice that cannot be considered as a given but rather as a gift. The community's validation is being traced in the moments before firewalking: moments of not having, or at least of not having carried out yet. It can also be traced in the moments after. After the office has been accomplished, the "gift" from each Anastenaris to herself/himself and to the other, the other participant, the witness and the Saint has been given. What was given? Was giving an act of sharing, in that sense of love that may also have involved *Danaos*, a threat in disguise?

Babis Papadopoulos said to me in 2009 (this discussion will form part of Narrative One): "When I walk on fire I feel that I empty. I do not know where all that

goes.” I am interpreting Papadopoulos’s “all that” as different sorts of thoughts, representations, feelings, possibly including problems and preoccupations too, hostility, expectations found and lost. Where does “all that” go? Is “all that” part of the gift? And what happens after “all that” is gone? Maybe the feeling of liberation that Babis describes could also be seen as a lack. The lack of “all that.”

A Violent Loss of Borders

Uncertainty when faced with firewalking is related to the risk of a “violent loss of borders.” Firewalking is a practice where this danger is present, borders signifying here our own knowledge or preconceptions about the body’s natural limitations (“bodies get burnt when in contact with fire”) and the borders of the self when faced by what seems like a problematic field. Why problematic? Firewalking is this practice, enacted in common, that is both “hospitable” and “hostile.”

Using the participants’ reports – including one from Pantelis Christopoulos, who told me that the reason he became an Anastenaris was that he wanted to walk on fire – and also an account of my feelings when faced with firewalking – which are described in detail in the first and the third narrative – I believe that both the participants and the witnesses can be at the same time fascinated and threatened by this practice. Do the fascination and the threat relate to the “hospitability” and the “hostility” involved in the *munus*?

It is clear that the sight of fire causes feelings of both protection and threat which one could easily associate not only with ancestral memories of the humanity – fire guarding from wild beasts as well as fire causing death and destruction – but also the feelings of relaxation or anguish and discontent experienced by contemporary

people, when watching a fire. Yet there is something more. Being involved with others in the practices of the ritual performance can create ambiguous feelings, although the goal of the Anastenaria consists in resolving such ambiguity in order to reinforce the links of the community. The presence of the other Anastenarides – quoting Maria Louisa Papadopoulou in 2010 – “gives her strength” and therefore facilitates the enactment of the firewalking. In that sense walking on fire with the others can be considered as “hospitable.”

However, it is the presence of the others that may turn the practice “hostile” too, as when the participants are walking on the same pyre they are claiming the same territory and in that sense they sometimes have to (or choose to) compete (or not) with each other. As Maria Louisa Papadopoulou told me, she sometimes gets annoyed by the fact that Mina Machairopoulou wants to walk for a longer period of time than the others – therefore claiming the space more than the others. Papadopoulou allows her to do so, while simultaneously reducing the time she is able to walk herself.

Apart from this silent negotiation, Papadopoulou and the others have to sense, or to pick the right moments, so that they do not stumble upon one another. They have to be aware of each other’s presence, in a situation that involves the potential for a violent loss of borders, the Anastenarides literally stumbling upon them or, if we echoed Espositos’ discussion on community bordering on death as belonging to the grand philosophical tradition ²⁶. Interpreting Hobbes, the author writes: “What men have in common, what makes them more like each other than anything else, is their generalised capacity to be killed: the fact that anyone can be killed by anyone else” ²⁷. The Anastenarides overcome the troubling borders of fear in front of physical pain and death when walking on the coals and enacting the animal sacrifice. This sacrifice,

among other things, refers to the symbolic death of the individual, which is necessary so that the community can be formed. The animal sacrifice, this common murder, replaces human sacrifice, humans abolishing what they have in common (the capacity to kill each other).

This discussion continues as part of the second commentary on Narrative One. What follows here is a preliminary argument on this double or ambiguous nature of *munus* and the violent loss of borders. The first remark concerns violence and the question of avoiding or controlling it. The ritual performance of the Anastenaria is linked not only with firewalking but also with this animal sacrifice which as I have argued contains an important symbolic charge having to do with humans, who are seen as members of a community as well as members of families.

It is interesting that the violence contained in the bull or lamb sacrifice of the Anastenaria is concealed or exorcised in several ways, i.e. by treating the animals very gently, adorning them with flowers and making sure that they do not suffer unnecessarily. It is also worth noting that during the ancient bull sacrifice in Greece, which Jean Pierre Vernant and his collaborators in *La Cuisine du Sacrifice en Pays Grec* have compared to the Anastenaria and other animal sacrifices in modern Greece, violence was concealed too: few grains thrown on the animal, the animal turning its head to the one and the other side, was interpreted as a sign of consent to its death.

The second remark concerns the question of the (violent) loss of borders. It is clear that the danger of the loss of borders is present in the minds of the participants. This is obviously the reason why the chief Anastenaris, as well as his homologues in other rituals, try to control who takes part in the ritual, especially people who could eventually act violently, harming themselves or others.

It is, however, worth noting that the Anastenaria ritual performance, which imposes on the participant to face danger thus investigating and gaining control of the borders of his capacity of self-control, is on the other hand retracing, sanctifying and thus protecting the borders, urban and/or rural of their community. At the beginning of the twentieth century – when the Anastanaria was performed in a far vaster semi-rural area – Richard Dawkins had linked it to what he claimed to be a similar function to the rituals of Dionysus. The difficult and dangerous itineraries of the Anastenarides at the beginning of the twentieth century as well as that of the ancient Bacchoi were supposed to trace, sanctify and protect the borders of the community in the same way as their difficult inner experience traced, sanctified and protected them as individuals.

The Eliminated Anastenaria Practices

Throughout this Chapter as well as in Chapters Five and Six I will make use of Isabelle Stengers' work on eliminated practices, developed by Alan Read in his paper "Abandoned Practices," in which he seeks to "identify, recover and examine examples of those practices which have been abandoned for economic, political or disciplinary reasons." As Read puts it, "Rather than privileging those practices that 'endure,' the research interest for me at the moment is settling more on those practices that are eliminated" 28.

The Anastenaria ritual continues to be performed in Langadas and other places in Greece as it has been for many decades now. It is in this sense a surviving ritual, or at least a ritual some practices of which have "endured." However, other Anastenaria practices can be considered as eliminated. There are some definite signs of abandonment for "economic, political or disciplinary reasons." Among these signs are: the lack of funds that results in the participants not being able to buy the most

appropriate sacrificial animal (see Chapter Six, Narrative Three); the subsequent refusal to initiate a ticket so that the ritual does not change, while at the same time the Anastenarides ask for money from the witnesses who are using cameras, therefore allowing a change to take place (see present Chapter, Narrative One); the ritual's continuous persecution by the Church; in the less recent past, the prohibition to perform in front of a public. More examples will be discussed in the pages that follow.

Isabelle Stengers' and Alan Read's work on eliminated practices serves not only as a means to reflect upon "a cemetery of already destroyed practices," but also enables us to reflect upon the "reactivation of previously excluded practices" 29.

In Chapter One I explored how the Anastenaria ritual is seen as constantly changing, in a dynamic way. I will therefore be taking note of and interpreting the changes happening, changes from one year to the next, but also, sometimes, from one day to the next or within the same day. These changes involve practices getting destroyed and other practices being reactivated, in front of the witnesses' eyes. In some cases one does not know whether to expect destruction or a reactivation, as for example with firewalking. There are such moments of not knowing whether firewalking will happen or not, whether this practice will be eliminated or reactivated. Such moments are of course, among others, the ones that precede walking on fire.

However, I consider the other, maybe less spectacular practices that come even earlier – these are described in detail in the three narratives and include: animal sacrifice, dancing on the carpet and the other practices that were introduced in the summary – as geared towards the culminating moments of walking on fire, as preparatory and in that sense vital steps. Their survival seems crucial. And it is in the

practice of firewalking itself and the ones that follow, the moments after – the final dance inside the *konaki* and the common dinner – that one should rather look for an affirmation that the practice of firewalking and, through it, community was reactivated. Finally, using the forgotten lyrics of an Anastenaria song as an example, I will investigate whether the elimination of a practice might be a symptom of the practice's survival. In other words, I am discussing the loss of a practice as a requirement for it to be found. I am interested in what such retrieval may facilitate.

The elements discussed above were only introduced here. The extent to which they are being used efficiently in relation to the three narratives on Langadas and the research conducted there in 2009, 2010 and 2011 remains to be seen in practice. Instead of pre-deciding their usefulness my aim is to test it through the challenges presented by the three narratives.

Narrative One, Anastenaria, Langadas, May 2009

Introduction

This narrative is based on the same material as the description of the Anastenaria in Chapter Two. However, at a difference to that chapter that focused on the ecstatic dimension of the Anastenaria, the narrative that follows consists in a more detailed description that traces the question of whether the Anastenaria can be considered as a surviving ritual performance. The theoretical framework makes use of the definition of the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria via Conquergood and Benjamin, the definition of an Anastenaria community via Esposito, and Stengers' and Read's work on eliminated practices.

The narrative touches upon the following elements. 1) Eliminated practices in the Anastenaria such as the familial clash in Langadas, the condition of the *konaki*, the forgetting of the lyrics of the Mikrokonstantinos song, the absence of the musicians, the fact that the witnesses are fewer when compared to past decades, and the uncertainty of whether the Anastenarides will walk on fire or not seen as potential elimination. Furthermore, the Anastenaria belongs to practices that were abandoned, condemned and persecuted by Christians. I argue that a form of repression might relate to the recurring theme of familial clashes and that this forgetting or repression could be a sign of the survival of practices because of their elimination. I conclude that the participants' interest in the ritual is not eliminated. 2) The discussion of a "rigorous connection between foreground and distance" in relation to the witness. There is a gradual shift of this relationship that also involves steps forward and back. I observe that not all elements of the Anastenaria ritual performance are open to the witnesses and that therefore there might still be certain things that resist even well-phrased questions, or close observations, certain things left unsaid, undefined or not explained yet. The division, the line between participants and witnesses, is made clearer during the practice of firewalking. I argue that it is a fine line, as the witnesses are potential new participants. 3) The discussion of the Anastenaria community which performs an animal sacrifice: I maintain that it is likely that the animal transports, in this involuntary exit beyond the borders, the faults, or the violence of an entire community.

In relation to the central question on the survival of the Anastenaria, as one of the participants says, the Anastenarides "have not mixed tradition with changes." However, they are "adjusting to the era." Even if they do not intend to change their practices, their practices change. Furthermore, the witness can play a key role in the

“reactivation of previously excluded practices,” by affecting the balance between “tradition” and “change.” I conclude that in the practice of firewalking we can trace the reactivation of their community, which occurs mainly after the Anastenarides overcome their uncertainty and walk on fire. This practice uses, embraces both the threat and the loss and in that sense it incorporates them. Finally, I maintain that the engaged witnesses as well as the participants both receive the community’s gift, even if the witnesses do not initiate it and I ask the following question, to be answered as part of the next Chapter. Are those who are being affected by the ritual taking part in the reactivation of the community too?

Part One, 20th of May

Evening

I leave the hotel and I know I have to find the house in which the Anastenaria is taking place, that is called *konaki*. Today is supposed to be the preparatory day – no firewalking will take place. An old man and his wife drive me to the *konaki* they used to go to in the past in order to witness the ritual. They tell me there is not just one *konaki*. There are two *konakia*. Until recently the Anastenarides of Langadas used to gather all together and walk on fire at the central square of the village, but four or five years ago (according to the man) and fifteen years ago (according to the woman) they were divided into two groups. Since then these two groups walk on fire separately near each different *konaki*. The two owners of the *konakia* are members of the same family. When I ask the couple if they know something more about this division the man replies ‘politics got in the way.’

I can see the *konaki* now. It is a big white house with a spacious courtyard. Many people are gathered outside. I ask a few of them if Mina Machairopoulou, my contact in Langadas, is here. Apparently she is not. I call her on the phone. I describe what the place I am at looks like. She tells me she is at the other *konaki*. After listening to contradicting directions from passers-by that result into walking in circles, I find it. It was just a few blocks away. There is a metal door that looks old, and a small courtyard. The walls probably used to be white but now they are grey. There are more trees and plants. This building is shorter and smaller. There are fewer people gathered here.

This house too is open to the public. Before entering the door of the house that is open, I overhear a discussion between two visitors. The man informs the woman that firewalking takes place on the street and the woman says: “On the street? This is not what I had expected.” They leave.

I now enter through the open door. Some people that as I would find out later were a mixed group of participants and visitors are seated around the only table, which is covered with a colourful tablecloth, eating raisins. There is a room on the right. This door is closed. There is one more room on the left. This door is open. Inside a man is playing the *daouli*, a Greek – and Balkan – big drum and two people are dancing on a colourful carpet.

A man and a woman. The woman, especially because of the way she is dressed, looks as if she is not from Langadas, but from a big city. She is dancing, following the rhythm played by the musician. She is taking a few steps forward and then a few steps back, pressing her feet hard on the ground, grounded, her weight almost abandoned, then she repeats the same improvised choreography over and over

again. The man is dancing almost on the spot, barely lifting his feet off the ground.

The woman looks around her. Our eyes meet. The man looks down.

While they are dancing, another woman (whose name as I found out later is Georgia Georgopoulou) is singing a song about a boy named Konstantinos. He has the same name as Saint Constantine, celebrated on the 21st of May. I know this song. Or maybe not. The version I am familiar with is talking about adultery, infanticide and cannibalism. This version I hear today is one I've never heard before. I will translate it from Greek to English:

Konstantinos the little or young Konstantinos

His mother and him, young

His mother made him get engaged when he was young.

When he was young a message arrived

When he was young a message arrived: go to the war.

At night he saddles the horse

At night he nails the horseshoes

He puts silver horseshoes

Golden nails

He jumps and rides the horse

He jumps and rides the horse and says this:

Mother, mother, my sweetheart,

Mother, look after my sweetheart,

She must eat well in the morning

Well at lunchtime

And when the sun sets

And when the sun sets
She must go to bed
But his mother, the bitch, the outlaw,
The Jew's daughter,
She sat her on the stool,
She sat her on the stool and she cuts her hair...

Georgia forgets the rest of the lyrics. She asks the others if they remember. They say they do not. She does not seem bothered. She starts humming. Now she stops humming and I can hear the drum alone. After a while the man and the woman stop dancing.

From what some of the other participants tell me, while eating raisins, the dates of firewalking have changed as well. I do not have the time to ask why and what the old dates were. The woman who was dancing approaches us – us, the people in the central room eating raisins around the table – asking who Ioli is. She introduces herself. She is Mina Machairopoulou, whom I was supposed to meet. I ask her when the sacrifice takes place. She asks an old man with white hair and bright blue eyes. His name is Anastasios Gaitatzis and he is the grandfather, the chief-Anastenaris and also the owner of the *konaki*. He replies it will take place tomorrow around ten-eleven a.m. Mina tells me I can come back for this. She then apologises because not all the musicians have showed up today. She says there will be no more music tonight. I understand she means it is time for me to go.

I take a cab back to the hotel. The cab driver asks me what I was doing at the *konaki*. I tell him I am studying the Anastenaria. He tells me that many journalists have come to Langadas to find out “the secret” of why the Anastenarides do not get

burnt. Makis Triantafyllopoulos, one of the country's most famous journalists, came here twice.

He also tells me that twenty years ago he had asked a participant if he had walked on fire on the night of the 21st of May. The exact words he uses are "if he walked," an expression the Anastenarides use too and that I would hear repeatedly over the next days. The participant had replied to him "It did not come to me." I ask the cab driver: "What is *it*?" and he replies: "I don't know, some force, some power. That's why I believe they must have a secret."

Commentary One

What one could note in the above succession of observations is that at the beginning of my first visit I literally did not see the *konaki*, as the first *konaki* was not the one I had intended to visit. For a few moments I mistook the first *konaki* for the one I had planned to visit. The phonecall with Mina Machairopoulou made me realise it was not. Then my gaze abandoned the first *konaki* and captured the second one with some disappointment mixed with relief. Disappointment as it was poorer, less taken care of, less impressive, more abandoned. Relief for exactly the same reasons, as when seeing a poorer, neglected, less impressive space one is faced by her/his own preconception that the ritual performance will be more *authentic* here, in the sense that the practices will be remembered, not eliminated, within a space that seems so neglected that it might as well belong to the past.

However, the couple who drove me to the first *konaki* also spoke of a divided community. There was just one *konaki* in the past, which was divided at some point. The woman and the man disagreed on the time this division took place, possibly

because of their old age, or because (this became an argument when the Anastenarides refused to talk to me about it – as seen in the second and third part of Narrative One) this division might not constitute an easy subject and in that sense it might be repressed by the inhabitants of Langadas or, more precisely, by the Anastenarides and those close to the Anastenarides's groups. The fact that the two *konakia* belong to members of the same family might have something to do with this tendency they have not to speak about the division and in that sense repress it.

The first meeting with the Anastenarides surprised me too. I identified them as “people who eat raisins,” and “a man and a woman dancing on a colourful carpet,” as if they were some paintings' titles, such as “still life with grapefruit.” What I mean by this free association is that I did not make a distinction between the human and the non human objects but rather I looked at the Anastenarides, the raisins and the carpet as smaller parts of a bigger picture ³⁰. In that case the “rigorous connection between foreground and distance” resulted in a mixture between distance and foreground that did not allow the focus on the foreground – or the “details” – and through it the familiarity and in that sense the connection to what is seen that the habit enables.

What about the Anastenarides' dance, their back-and-forth walking, and then their own gaze? Again, as if they were part of a tableau vivant, the picture is pointing towards the ground. Something will happen in the near future that has to do with the ground. This is where their body weight goes, carelessly, almost abandoned. Walking back and forth could signify different sorts of things. I am almost certain that if I asked them why they dance in this way they would reply “because this is how we found it” (a recurring answer they give.) For the purposes of this text, however, these steps could serve as the embodiment of their uncertainty; one could think of these

steps as a durational, preparatory inner monologue: “Will I walk? Will I not walk?” The above thought becomes more justified if we think of these steps’ difference to the steps of the actual firewalking, after the uncertainty is over. There is no back and forth then, the feet are only moving forward.

There are two elements of the *Mikrokonstantinos* song that I would like to discuss. The first is that through it new names were introduced to me: the first name I heard, even before finding out the Anastenarides’ names, was Konstantinos. The song’s lyrics are about someone called Konstantinos – sharing the same name with the Saint in whose honour this celebration is taking place, as mentioned in Chapter One, although Konstantinos of the song is a boy with no such status or power as the Saint’s.

The young and seemingly powerless man who begs his mother for his sweetheart’s well-being when he is away, is going to the war. He must be or at least considered to be capable of killing others. He also owns – or his mother does – fair amounts of silver and gold that he is using to embellish his horse. Could he be someone powerful in sheep’s clothing? Eventually, the Saint in one of his disguises, and therefore someone very powerful despite his apparent powerlessness, or at least someone connected with the Saint? Then the mother tortures the girl – a member of her family and the one she chose for her son – instead of taking care of her. Then the lyrics are forgotten.

Forgetting the lyrics at the high point of the song – for the first-time witness does not know what will happen next, whether the tortures will continue or Konstantinos will return and rescue the girl – does not bother the participants – for there are no signs of any particular struggle to remember it or of guilt about having

forgotten it. The dance continues uninterrupted. The forgetting is incorporated into the practice.

This incident could also serve as an example of eliminating a practice as something that does not necessarily involve being aware of the action of doing so. Elimination seems to remain unnoticed, or seemingly so, as one could argue there might also be some repression involved. Could it be that this repression has to do with the fact that the lyrics are talking about familial clashes again? As the details about the division of the *konaki* in Langadas (and the division of the family) are not yet communicated to me (by the two inhabitants and old witnesses of the ritual and by the Anastenarides, as the reader will see later in the last part of Narrative One) and because they are not socialised, it is in that sense that they become repressed. Would this mean that they have been eliminated? Not necessarily, because they are remembered and therefore surviving between the participants.

However, I suspect that elements like this division might be too painful for them to discuss often, even between themselves (only in 2011 would I overhear one participant whisper to another the reason behind the division) and that's why I am suggesting a form of repression that might relate to the recurring theme of familial clashes. Ranging from the familial clash among the Anastenarides that is not being communicated and the familial clash the song talks about and that is not being communicated either as it is being forgotten.

One could also suspect that this forgetting or repression could be a sign of the survival of practices because of their elimination. The reason of the split is repressed, because remembering and talking about it still would create discontent. Yet this is by no means necessarily a conscious process. The same could possibly apply to the

forgetting – and eventual repression – of the lyrics. Nevertheless, there are also other reasons for this forgetting, for example the general frame of contemporary life in a big city – where many of the Anastenarides dwell during the rest of the year – causing oblivion or disfigurement of the Anastenaria ideas, values, practices etc.

I will finish my commentary on the first part of this Narrative by the following observation: the fact that Mina asked me to leave the *konaki* probably constitutes a proof that not all elements of the Anastenaria ritual performance are open to the witnesses. The same might also be listed among the reasons why the witnesses' curiosity regarding a "secret" is aroused. (A more obvious reason being that most of them do not claim to know of a more or less scientific explanation of the *akaia*, this Greek term expressing the fact that the Anastenarides' feet do not get burnt, as was also explained as part of Chapter One).

In that sense, persistent journalists and curious witnesses who desire to breach the borders of the Anastenaria ritual, to break into real or symbolic closed doors might manage to make these borders, these doors open for a little while. And yet, there might still be certain things that resist even well-phrased questions, or close observations, certain things left unsaid, undefined or not explained yet. For example the "it" involved in "it did not come to me." The uncertainty of that Anastenaris in front of walking on fire (or not) on that particular year gave its place to the certainty that, as "it" did not come, "it" was not here, he could not and would not walk this time.

Let us now investigate some more preparatory practices that precede the practice of firewalking.

Part Two, 21st of May

Morning

At eleven o'clock I return to the *konaki* for the animal sacrifice. There are around fifteen people getting ready to leave the house. I recognise some of them from the night before. There is no animal. I wonder where the animal is. We all exit the house and start walking. One after the other. The grandfather – the chief Anastenaris – is walking in front. The same musician as yesterday is playing the *daouli*. I walk behind them all. I am recording this walk with my camera. A long walk. A man is recording too. He is walking just in front of me. He keeps getting in front of my camera and sometimes the only thing recorded is his back. I am trying to walk a bit faster. I end up next to a smiling woman who asks me why I came to Langadas. I tell her I am writing my PhD on the Anastenaria. (I am adjusting my answer to this question according to who is asking and to what I am assuming they will be expecting to hear.)

We now arrive at a house. More people are waiting for the Anastenarides there. A man, apparently the owner of the house, opens a small door. He drags a young, beautiful sheep towards us. Two women offer us a drink. A young man, whose name as I would find out later on was Babis Papadopoulos, approaches the sheep. A woman tells him: "Are you sure? It is heavy." Babis, without saying anything, bends his knees and lifts the sheep, placing its feet around his neck. He asks them for a sip of the drink. A woman places the bottle that is made out of clay on his lips. I ask if the drink is alcoholic. I am told that it is holy water (*aghiasmos*). Mina approaches Babis with some raisins. He opens his mouth and eats them out of her palm.

We walk back to the *konaki*. A younger man cuts the sheep's throat with a knife. It does not die at once. The man has to persist, use his knife again and again as the animal is shaking, sounds coming out of its throat and its blood dripping on the earth. The animal's feet are moving forward as if it would like to escape. It cannot move forward as the man is holding it. Then the feet stop moving. The Anastenarides go back inside the house, one by one. I stay. I watch. The young man and Babis hang the animal using a string. They blow air through its anus using a device and now the animal becomes bigger and bigger like a balloon. The young man skins the animal. I stay there until he finishes. Babis and I have our noses covered.

I go back inside. I ask Mina what happens next. She replies that I can go back to my hotel, as they are going to cook the animal now. I understand it is time for me to leave the *konaki* again. Mina says that I can come back around five o'clock. It is then that they will start preparing the pyre. They will "walk" around nine p.m.

21st of May, Afternoon

In the afternoon I come back. The same people who brought the animal to the house this morning are now dancing inside the room where Mina and the man (his name is Lfteris Chronidis as I find out when he introduces himself to me) were dancing yesterday. There are also some people that I have not seen before. They move as if the place was unfamiliar to them. The purpose of their movement seems to be to watch the Anastenarides dancing. They must have come here to observe. They are sitting inside this room – there are seats by the walls that circle the Anastenarides – and also in the main room.

While sitting inside the main room one can see through the open door part of what is happening in the room where the dance takes place. The same musician is playing the *daouli* and Georgia is singing the same song. I sit down inside the main room and watch. I record for a while, waiting to hear if she will forget the lyrics again.

Mina comes to the main room and tells me that because of the fact that they have no funding, they are asking the people who record to leave some money on the table. I was not expecting that she would ask me for money. I go to the table and leave twenty euros. I exit the house.

A man approaches me. He asks me if I am a PhD student. I say yes. We smile to each other. He is a professor from the Sorbonne. He is there with his wife, also a professor. He asks me if I know where the other *konaki* is. I tell him that it is nearby. He asks if I will go. I tell him I will probably do so later. He asks me to let them know so that they can come with me. Then I see Babis. The colour of his eyes is dark brown. I introduce myself to him. I ask whether he has some time to talk to me. He takes me somewhere where there are not many people. Another man laughs and asks him if we want to be on our own. Babis does not pay attention to him. I can hear loud music coming from somewhere else, not from the *konaki*. I open my notebook.

I: When was the first time that you attended the Anastenaria?

Babis: In 2004.

I: Has the ritual changed since 2004?

B: The same things happen every year.

I: From what you have heard, has the ritual changed compared to the past?

B: In the past all the participants were from this area. Now, half of us are not from here. People used to talk about the Anastenaria during the whole year. There was just one *konaki* and many people gathered to watch. There are pictures with thousands of people.

I: Do you know if the division of the old *konaki* played a role to these changes?

B: I do not know.

I: Are the witnesses easily accepted?

B: Yes, but one needs to respect, as s/he does not know this thing. One needs to respect not the faith, but the people.

I: What do you feel while walking on the coals?

B: I feel like walking on a beach barefoot. If it hurt I would not do it, but I cannot feel the heat.

I: Has there ever been an accident?

B: Yes, some tourists did it for fun. They received burns. The Anastenarides never had an accident. If you do not feel it, you do not do it. If an Anastenaris does not feel it, he does not do it.

I: How do you know that this year you are going to walk?

B: You know. There is no question. It is something absolute. You turn the corner (after exiting the *konaki* you turn right and face the fire that has been lit on the street outside the house) and you know.

I: When did you walk for the first time?

B: I did not walk in 2004. I walked in 2005. I felt it, I left my family at night, I took a night bus and I came here. When you want to enter, you enter. If you want to do something, anything and you believe in it, you will do it. If you don't want and if it does not want you, you will not do it.

He talks to me for some more time and then says he has to go back inside and get ready. I thank him. He goes back inside. I look at the pyre. The pieces of wood have not turned into coals yet. There is some more time left. I decide to go to the other *konaki*. On my way there and a few hundred metres from the *konaki* I was before, I pass by a big, colourful, busy amusement park. This is where the loud music was coming from. I can see the other *konaki* now. It is packed. There is so much artificial

light in the courtyard. Some people are shouting. I cannot see the fire. I am pleased that Mina, my contact here, does not go to this one and therefore I did not have to go to this one either. I go back so that I do not miss the firewalking.

Commentary Two

When I return to the same *konaki* just a day later I am able to recognise some parts of the space and some of the people who are here. However, other elements are completely new. I was not expecting to walk to another house to bring the animal, walking one by one, Babis carrying it on his shoulders etc. I imagined all the parts of the ritual taking place in one house, while it in fact involves gathering in one house and then exiting from it, traveling to another house, only to return to the first house later.

There is a gradual shift of the relationship between foreground and distance that also involves steps forward and back, somehow similar to the steps of the dance enacted at the *konaki*. On return, I am not surprised by parts of the pictures in front of my eyes, for I have seen them a day before. At the same time, I am surprised by others. Even if the earliest, the first day's picture cannot be restored, the second day's picture still has "not yet gained preponderance through a constant exploration that has become habit" as Benjamin suggested. As a witness I still do not know a great deal of the Anastenaria practices, as I have never seen them before.

I have never seen a sheep getting killed before. An animal sacrifice, like the ones described by James Frazer, Anastasios Hourmouziadis, Mircea Eliade or Stella Georgoudi among others. This animal is young and beautiful. It is a gift from the owner of the animal to the Anastenarides, while also becoming, through the sacrifice,

a gift from the Anastenarides. To whom? The earth it stains with its blood? Saints Constantine and Helen? Or the Anastenaria community? One of the elements used to define it earlier was “not having,” but on the contrary “a debt, a pledge, a gift that is to be given, and that therefore will establish a lack” 31.

According to Vernant and Georgoudi 32, in ancient Greek sacrifice the victim constituted an offer divided between gods and men, the former receiving the scent of the cooked flesh and the latter the meat. Prometheus, responsible for the unequal division, was punished by the gods for his gift which favoured mankind. The analogy with ancient sacrifice might theoretically imply that the Anastenarides’ gift might be destined both to the Saints and to the community. Yet animal sacrifice that is destined to please the Saints might be considered as a practice suspect of idolatry, an accusation addressed by the Greek Orthodox clergy against the Anastenarides, who have often faced several legal obstacles concerning animal sacrifice, as mentioned in Chapter One.

The animal dies. Does it serve as a scapegoat, which according to Eliade in *The myth of the eternal return: Cosmos and History* becomes “the material vehicle through which the faults of the entire community are transported beyond the limits of the territory it inhabits” 33? The Anastenarides literally exit the limits of their territory – if we consider the *konaki* to be their territory – in order to get it. The sheep in turn travels beyond the limits, or the borders, remembering Esposito, of the territory it used to live within, being violently taken away from its home and carried to the *konaki*. It also attempts to escape, its feet moving forward, to escape the destined departure from the territory of the living. What does the one that was transported (on Babis’s shoulders) transport when it dies? Is it likely that it transports, in this

involuntary exit beyond the borders, the faults, or the violence of an entire community?

For Esposito, the “abandonment of oneself” to what he calls “the ultimate *munus*” is not painless ³⁴. The painful – to the animal – sacrifice might be a means towards the “transportation of the faults of the entire community beyond the limit of the territory it inhabits”, but has the Anastenarides’s abandonment to their *munus* occurred yet? Or, for it to occur, the Anastenarides must overcome their own fear in front of another, individual violent loss of borders? Can this fear be abolished with the transportation of past faults, past violence of a past community through an animal? Or it persists until the new community is formed by them? (When they overcome their uncertainty whether they will walk on fire or not). When, as Babis said, they know.

The animal sacrifice is not enough for them to know. When they know, they will enter the pyre. Possibly feeling that there is no risk at all. After having overcome uncertainty. Uncertainty not only in front of whether there is something at stake or not (losing oneself, for example) but also uncertainty before what this benefit, or better this gift, will be and whether the gift will be worth the stake.

For Babis, in order to enjoy the gift, a mutual agreement is needed. Between “it” and you. “It” is not fire. “It” uses fire as its medium. Fire stands between you and “it.” Through the gift – understood as the opposite of the given here – of wanting to walk, experiencing desire as a lack and then walking on fire, the community of the Anastenarides can potentially be “kept together, in the technical sense of “to lack” and “to be wanting” ³⁵.

Babis also talks about changes to the ritual. Pictures of the old visitors stand as silent witnesses of the fact that the Anastenaria used to be witnessed by more people in the past. Mina asks for money from those who use a camera. Eliminated practices

36. Each time the Anastenarides experience the uncertainty of whether they will walk on fire or not. However there is something they seem to be certain of. These few people's interest in the ritual is not eliminated. Let us now investigate the potential yet constantly repeated reactivation of the practice of firewalking and through that the formation of a community.

Part Three: 21st of May

Evening

There are around fifty people waiting for the Anastenarides to come outside. A string surrounds the pyre, in order to protect the witnesses from the fire, while also defining the limits of the space that is not for us, the witnesses, but for them, the participants. I was not expecting this division. I was also not expecting to see a police car and two policemen here. I try to be as close to the pyre as I can.

The Anastenarides finally exit from the *konaki*, one after the other, in a line. They come towards the pyre. The same repetitive music is heard. Some people start pushing in order to get a better view. I am now recording with the camera again. The Anastenarides are dancing in a circle, outside the pyre. Now the circle breaks and they must be walking on the coals. Are they? It is dark, I cannot see very well. Only when a picture is taken can I see their feet touch the coals.

Two of them are carrying icons. They are probably the icons of the two Saints, Constantine and Helen, that I had seen inside the *konaki*. The witnesses keep pushing. Some of them are shouting. I remember what Babis said about respect. There does not seem to be much respect “to the people, not the faith” here and now. The Anastenarides are silent. The witnesses are noisy.

I am still recording with the camera. I can see better now. No matter how much I want to record the firewalking, I turn the camera off. Now I turn it on again, because I feel I have to capture this. No, I want to see this. I turn the camera off.

What I see affects me in the following way. It is as if my body receives a strong force. I can feel something – invisible and undefinable – coming towards me from where the Anastenarides are. It is as if this something is forcing me to watch, forcing me to stand still, to focus my attention, to forget the noise coming from some of the other witnesses around me.

Something is forcing me to stay. Might that be what Babis said? There are no questions in my mind and not many thoughts. I just stand still. Later on I would compare this feeling to the one I had in Tuscany in 1994, when, at the age of twelve and high up on a tower, while watching the nature in front of me, with a group of actors playing the guitar and performing acrobatics behind me, I turned to my father and said: “I could die now.”

The Anastenarides stop. They did not walk for a long time. It must have been twenty minutes, or maybe half an hour. The witnesses are leaving in small groups and the Anastenarides go back to the *konaki*. I sit on a piece of wood outside the house, unable to keep a note, unable to speak. I am not eager to ask questions, as I was

before. I find no reason to ask a single question. No matter how cliched and influenced by the famous Shakespearean “words, words, words” (*Hamlet*, Act II, Scene II) they sound, these are the only words that I can write: “No word can describe the absolute. No word can say why you feel what you feel.” Babis, on his way to smoke a cigarette, asks me what the matter is. I tell him I cannot find a reason to speak. He tells me to go inside. We will eat.

Dinner will be served in the same room the participants were dancing in earlier and the night before. The women bring a tablecloth and put it on the floor. I am looking forward to an alcoholic drink. Now I see a plastic bottle. They all stand up. I stand up too. The grandfather holds the bottle. He says: “Happy festivals. To next year.” He takes one sip and passes the bottle to the person standing next to him, who paraphrases the grandfather’s words and takes one sip. The bottle arrives in my hands, I say: “To next year.” I have one sip. It is *raki*, a strong alcoholic drink. There is no more alcohol. Now we’ll have to drink water or Coke.

A man with long blond hair is seated next to me. He is one of the witnesses. He tells me he is living in Thessaloniki and that he is a horse breeder. He also says that fire fascinates him. When there is a full moon he and his friends gather at a beach near Thessaloniki and light a fire.

We are eating meat, pasta, bread and olives. I have a look around me. The Anastenarides seem relaxed now, their cheeks red, their eyes shining. They talk more to each other and to their guests. They address each other and make jokes. They laugh. When the dinner is over and the people are leaving the room, Mina tells me that we can talk. I sit beside her.

Interviewer: When was the first time that you attended the Anastenaria?

Mina: In 1996.

I.: What has changed in the ritual since then?

M.: My way of looking at the world has changed.

I.: Did you walk from the first time you attended?

M.: Yes. I was shaking and crying. I could not stop crying. And I walked.

I.: From what you know/have heard, has the ritual changed compared to the past?

M.: Yes, we have some pictures that date back to the sixties where you can see three thousand people attending.

I.: What are your sources of funding?

M.: None. A few years ago the Mayor suggested we sell tickets. The grandfather believes this is outrageous. These people do not care about the custom.

I.: Does the ritual take place in other parts of Greece as well?

M.: Yes, in Mavrolefki, where the Town Hall is in charge, in Saint Helen, where the custom is more folkloric and in Meliki, where the ritual takes place behind closed doors.

I.: Does this big, noisy amusement park that is situated a few hundred meters from the *konaki* affect you?

M.: No, it does not.

I.: What kind of people do you welcome here?

M.: We want trusting, positive people, not suspicious and negative. The visitors in their majority are positive towards the custom. They touch us, believing that through that they can gain some kind of strength. Once a woman came and told us: "I dreamt that what you are doing is God's will. I came to tell you that. Now I will leave." She said that and left. People have faith.

Anastasios Gaitatzis, the grandfather, enters the room. Mina tells him I'd like to ask him some questions. Most of the other Anastenarides enter the room too. They sit down and I am writing down their names: Anastasios Gaitatzis, Konstantinos Gaitatzis, Fwteini Gaitatzi, Georgia Georgopoulou, Maria Louisa Papadopoulou, Mina Mahairopoulou, Thaleia Gaitatzi. The following discussion takes place.

I: What are the visitors' reactions to what you are doing?

Grandfather: Sometimes they cry and sometimes they understand it.

Konstantinos: There is no other Archianastenaris like him.

I: What is it that makes him different?

K: He is the only one who has a soul.

M: He's the only one who knows. The grandfather has not mixed tradition with changes. However, we are adjusting to the era.

Gr: You should come again. Konstantinos used to come here for three years and then he walked.

I (To the grandfather): For how many years now have you been an Anastenaris?

Gr: I became an Anastenaris when I was seventeen years old. Now I am seventy four. Tomorrow we are going to walk in Langadas. If someone wants us to pay them a visit, we'll be delighted to do so.

I: Has the ritual changed compared to the past?

Gr: Now we have more visitors.

I: What happened with the ticket?

Gr: I disagreed about the ticket.

I: Why?

Gr: The ticket is not part of the custom. We could have a ticket, but I want to follow tradition.

I: What do you feel when you walk on fire?

Gr: When we walk, we feel like birds.

I: Has there ever been an accident?

Gr: In 2005 someone had an accident. He suffered third-degree burns on his feet.

I: Babis told me that "if an Anastenaris does not feel it, he does not do it." What does the first "it" mean?

Georgia: We feel drawn towards something.

M: I entered in tears. We experience an euphoric state. That's it.

I: Why don't you speak when you walk on fire?

G: We respect the icons of the Saints and we do not speak. This is a space of worship, a religious space.

I: What does the word "Anastenaris" mean?

Gr: We say it because we found it that way.

K: The name's potential roots are either *anastenazo* (to sigh) or *anastainomai* (to resurrect). Do you know of Bulgaria's *Nistenari*, that takes place on the 6th of June?

I: I have heard of it. Do the cameras annoy you?

M: Yes, they are annoying.

G: Being watched though the camera is so different than being watched through bare eyes.

M: In Kerkini, the ritual takes place behind closed doors.

I: Are there disrespectful people among your visitors?

Gr: There are some signs of disrespect. Everyone comes here in order to learn a big secret and there is no secret. Important things are not learnt in this world.

G: Once a person was eating an ice-cream inside the *konaki*.

Thaleia: These people are disrespectful. It's as if you want to pray and another person enters the church smoking, or eating an ice-cream.

I: Thank you very much for your time.

I thank them. The grandfather kisses me on both cheeks and then kisses my hand. I do not know how to react. I leave.

Commentary Three

This division, this line between participants and witnesses, is made clearer by the string that surrounds the pyre. As opposed to Western theatre as far as I know it 37, here there is silence coming from the side of the performers and sound coming from the part of the audience. There is the sound of the *daouli*, so there is music coming from one of the participants – the musician accompanying the Anastenarides.

However, the sounds coming from the witnesses are louder. The witnesses are speaking while the participants are not. It is as if we were dealing with a performance with no words, the spectators of which do not just think about what they see but also express their criticism out loud. This is audible by the participants (as an influenced-by-television, distorted caricature of a 5th century BC audience following ancient comedy or satiric drama). Of course theatrical conventions such as the one of silence that is usually imposed upon an audience, sometimes interrupted by sounds of mobile phones followed by an angry look from the person who is seated right in front of the phone's owner, or a person coughing or someone whispering her/his criticism to another spectator, are not part of what we are witnessing here.

It also seems that what the Anastenarides wish they did not have – witnesses without ice-creams for example – is not being controlled by them. They do not seem to make any attempt to control it, at least not with words or “do not speak” and “ice-creams not allowed” signs. Each Anastenaris walks on fire after having faced the uncertainty of whether they will walk or not. They call themselves Anastenarides “because they found it that way.” They tolerate what they consider as signs of disrespect from the people who came to see them in order to find out “a big secret.” I am sure that there are many more witnesses than me, who, after watching them walk

on fire, did not feel like asking for bigger or smaller secrets but rather felt like not asking (for) anything, leaving things unsaid, abandoning them to the realm of unspoken practices (both in the sense that we do not speak while enacting or witnessing them and in the sense that we do not – want to or cannot – speak of them after.)

Finally, and even if the string was removed right before the Anastenarides walked on the coals, serving as the curtain that announced the beginning of the practice, the separation between the people who can walk on fire and the people who cannot walk remained. The separation between the people who can “go up” and the people who cannot, as Joe Kelleher writes in a different context in his article “It’s So Beautiful Here. Come, You Come Too”, in which one spectator invites another one to join her to “the darkness beyond the stage” using the above words ³⁸. Some former witnesses have “gone up.” They are these Anastenarides who first observed the ritual as witnesses, such as Mina, who shook and cried and joined the participants immediately. Others just came to Langadas, said something to the Anastenarides, touched them and left.

Because of this potential of the witnesses to “go up,” the line that divides the two is a fine one. A fine line. If things go wrong, if the loss of borders between the witness and the participant does not happen naturally but is forced instead, if violence gets in the way, the witness might not be able to participate because of third degree burns.

I have tried to clarify in Chapter One the relationship between the Anastenaria performance and theatrical performance for the purposes of this text as one between two notions that are akin and also rapidly changing, in motion. The use of tickets is a practice that remains pretty much unchanged when it comes to professional theatre,

dramatic or post-dramatic, even when we find ourselves in a “pay what you can” situation.

In Langadas the option of ticketing, of remuneration instead of a “gift,” remains a subject for discussion. This was what the Mayor of Langadas suggested and the Anastenarides rejected, their leader deciding not to have tickets ³⁹. However, they ask the witnesses who are using cameras to make a donation.

This practice of asking people to pay not in order to see through their bare eyes but in order to see through the lens of the camera, might have something to do with our discussion of firewalking as an eliminated practice. As now some of the witnesses are using cameras (one can find not only documentaries but also numerous YouTube videos on the Anastenaria ritual), as now a change has occurred from the witnesses’ side, another change is occurring from the Anastenarides’ side, despite their decision not to change anything.

They wish to be reimbursed for having their pictures-in-motion captured and used by the witnesses to address other, unknown witnesses, who might have never attended the ritual. As Mina said they “have not mixed tradition with changes” meaning that at least they do not intend to change their practices. Their reluctance was the reason why they disagreed with the Mayor of Langadas. They are however, “adjusting to the era.” Their practices change.

Babis said the Anastenarides want from their witnesses “respect, not to the faith but to the people.” Danforth writes about the necessity to perceive the Anastenarides “as our contemporaries and as equals” ⁴⁰. From what I observed the witnesses of the Anastenaria ritual are allowed some freedom. Not only “freedom of speech” in this

silent ritual. It is them too – and not only the participants – who can play a key role in the “reactivation of previously excluded practices,” by affecting the balance between “tradition” and “change.”

Furthermore, the Anastenaria practices are endangered. Not only because of the changes mentioned above – namely the number of the witnesses having decreased, the urbanization of the area, the fact that not all witnesses necessarily perceive the Anastenarides as their “equals” – but also because the ritual performance is not recognised by the official Church, that considers it as pagan and in that sense belonging to practices that were abandoned, condemned and persecuted by Christians. The Church has opposed to the Anastenaria “with the axe, with fire and with the whip and at other times with education, sermons and counselling” 41.

Maybe this lack of recognition explains the presence of the police. Maybe the police were there not only in order to protect the witnesses from the fire but also to protect the Anastenarides themselves from potential dangers such as insults or attacks by *other* Christians. Other is in italics here as the Anastenarides consider themselves as Christians although the official Church and its supporters do not recognise them as such. Alan Read writes in his article on the transhumance of sheep in the Drome:

But no sooner are a number of these abandoned practices abandoned, by which I mean they are not simply forgotten, considered surplus to requirement but are literally banned by an authority, a sovereign power or the EC, their repressed remainder in the form of ceremony and spectacle would appear to appear. 42

In this sense the participants in the other, bigger, brighter and louder *konaki* might be experiencing an even more severe form of repression than the one implied by the forgetting of the lyrics in this *konaki*. This “remainder in the form of ceremony and spectacle” will be discussed in more detail later, through another example that

forms part of the next Chapter. What I would like to stress here with the help of the above quote is that the Anastenaria belongs to the realm of the abandoned practices in the sense that it has been through so much, threatened by the fire at Kosti, persecuted “by fire and whip” by the Church, while also remaining “abandoned” until it is reactivated and in that sense confirmed each time: it is in the moments of turning at the corner and not knowing whether you will walk or not, in this uncertainty, that this other potential for abandonment lies.

One can be an Anastenaris even if s/he does not walk on fire, but out of all the Anastenaria practices, firewalking is one that an Anastenaris cannot be sure will happen this time (each time) as, from what the Anastenarides have reported, it is not only up to them or other humans. The Anastenaris fears that s/he might abandon this practice and that s/he might be abandoned by “it.” As Babis said “when you want something very much and it wants you, it will happen” and there is in that sense a need for mutuality, for reciprocation, clearly present in the practice of firewalking, so that “the form of ceremony and spectacle” can “appear.”

In addition, maybe in the grandfather’s illusion – as every other Anastenaris disagreed – that more people come to Langadas nowadays one could trace a sign of the denial, or the repression, of this fear of the abandonment of firewalking and the other Anastenaria practices by its witnesses. In a sense, as among the witnesses might be the future Anastenarides, there is also the possibility of this type of abandonment (through the physical absence) of firewalking and the other practices by the Anastenarides themselves.

Furthermore, in the practice of firewalking we can trace the reactivation of their *community*, which occurs mainly after the Anastenarides overcome their

uncertainty and walk on fire 43. Esposito considers the *munus* that the *communitas* shares as not “a property, or a possession.” “It isn’t having, but on the contrary, is a debt, a pledge, a gift that is to be given, and that therefore will establish a lack” 44.

We have already stated that the practice of firewalking cannot be taken for granted, as it is a few moments before they approach the fire that the participants know whether they will walk or not. In that sense walking is not a given but a gift. As Babis says, he empties. As the grandfather says, the Anastenarides feel “like birds.”

One could imagine a group of people experiencing a gift together, exchanging, receiving a gift – the call of the Saint, or the knowledge that they do “have a path.” At the same time, a burden is being removed from their shoulders. The burden of uncertainty or the one a gift can be 45, because there might be things that are hidden behind this gift. Threatening, dark, offensive, fatal things, that border on death. *Community* being among them.

What is being constructed, experienced, exchanged, or enacted by the Anastenarides through walking on fire might be a means towards the reactivation of a practice and survival over threats such as fire and the community itself. Persistence despite loss – loss of borders, as well as the loss of Kosti, the homeland of the Anastenarides. Rebirth despite death. This practice uses, embraces both the threat and the loss and in that sense it does not abolish them. It rather incorporates them.

Finally, the “force” felt by me when witnessing (the force produced by the formation of the community of the Anastenarides then and there in front of the witnesses’ eyes), made me lose any uncertainty I had as a witness (believing them or not), as well as a candidate participant (wanting to join them or not, become part of

this group or not). By being certain while doing nothing, performing no visible office, standing still, silent, expressionless, was I part of the Anastenarides' community during these moments? I gave nothing to the participants; nothing other than my attention. Is this attention combined with my determination to join them enough for me to consider myself as part of it? No. I did not become a participant. The other participants would need to accept me further into their group for this to happen. My initiation has not taken place yet. To what extent is the engaged witness part of the community?

The engaged witnesses as well as the participants both receive the community's gift, even if the witnesses do not initiate it. The risk of a violent loss of borders is present for them too. From the moment the string that divides the two areas is being removed each witness is responsible for her/his own safety. Are those who are being affected by the ritual taking part in the reactivation of the community too? Next year's findings will help me clarify this further.

Chapter Five

THE ANASTENARIA THROUGH CO-PERFORMATIVE WITNESSING IN MAY 2010: THE ROLE OF THE WITNESS IN RELATION TO THE COMMUNITY

Introduction

In Chapter Five I develop the theoretical framework that was introduced in Chapter Four. The differences between the way I witnessed the ritual performance in May 2009 and May 2010 are mentioned. The “earliest picture” that Walter Benjamin had spoken about in his aphorism “Lost-and-found office” could not be “restored” as I was focusing more and more on the foreground, on details of the Anastenaria practices. However, despite the “facade of a house vanishing as we enter it,” the facade sometimes kept coming back, returning. The abandonment of the distance and the focus on these details, my inability to see the big picture viewed before, interrupted by short-lived returns, enabled more intimate investigations.

I then discuss the role of the witness: I argue that the presence and therefore the role of the witness of the Anastenaria cannot be considered as a given, as this ritual performance does not depend on the witnesses in order to take place. I touch upon the ethnographer’s Konstantinos Romaios and psychiatrist’s Anghelos Tanagras contribution to the ritual performance in the fifties: they encouraged the Anastenarides to perform in front of witnesses. I then argue that even if being witnessed plays a secondary role, the witnesses are the potential new members and therefore important for the continuation and therefore the survival of the Anastenaria.

I maintain that when discussing the inclusion of new members to the community, we need to take into account what practices are allowed and what practices are forbidden to the witnesses/potential new members. I then argue that what the participants aim at is the demonstration and the overcoming of physical and psychological pain. Despite the prohibition to have loud reactions, the individual

freedom of expression is not being restricted and freedom of expression exists within a certain frame.

I then explain how the model of the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria is developed in 2010: I focused on details, while also taking into account that I was not the only one who looked. This change is reflected in the way Narrative Two was written. I had a conversation with the Anastenarides, not only talking about them, but also talking to and with them. In other words, my methodology shifted more towards what Dwight Conquergood has called “dialogical performance”: my methodology in 2010 shifted towards the witnessing of the self and the other (the Anastenarides, the participants) “together” while they were being “held apart.” The dialogical stance when witnessing the Anastenaria ritual consisted in an attempt to maintain the above balance.

I describe further the methodology used in the second narrative: I used flashbacks and free association in order to represent a less step-by-step way of witnessing. The second narrative and the comments upon it are more interwoven. I began to understand the participants’ rules more, the mechanism and structure behind their practices. My own relationship to the community of the Anastenarides changed in 2010. I ask whether this was due to a new way of looking at their practices, as I was not going as a first-time visitor but I returned. Could this also be due to a shift from *immunitas* towards *communitas* via Esposito? Was this one more step towards a potential participation? Did I, by not becoming a participant yet, enable the continuation of this research while at the same time eliminating the possibility of a practice? I explain the ambivalence of my role.

I then argue that, as a co-performer witness, I played a part. The means for me in order to do so was to return to practices I had associated with playing parts at Drama School and in productions in which I took part as an actress and a director, namely: listening; concentration; openness/availability; improvisation; a partly scripted-partly improvised dialogue. This quality of my witnessing the Anastenaria consisted in the perception of this witnessing as a part among other parts and other *dramatis personae*, in that sense too as co-performative and the deliberate that lies in this co-performance. This effort would prove to be a valuable step towards the third year that included my participation and the formation of a community of witnesses (Chapter Six).

In this chapter the central question of whether, under what circumstances and through which lens(es), the Anastenaria can be considered as a surviving ritual performance is approached through a focus on the role of the witness, considered here as a potential new member.

The witness in May 2010

There were significant differences between the way I witnessed the ritual performance in May 2009 and May 2010. The “earliest picture” that Walter Benjamin had spoken about in his aphorism “Lost-and-found office” could not be “restored” as I was focusing more and more on the foreground, on details of the Anastenaria practices ¹. However, despite the “facade of a house vanishing as we enter it,” the facade sometimes kept coming back, returning. The abandonment of the distance and the focus on these details, my inability to see the big picture viewed before, my “blindness” to it, interrupted by sudden, short-lived returns, have enabled more intimate investigations.

At the same time I was more aware of my presence as a witness while participating more in the picture. During my second visit to Langadas in 2010 I attempted a different approach to the field. The Anastenarides gather for three days. I stayed throughout their festival. Probably because I knew I would spend more time with them than the year before, I did not worry about my research necessarily producing immediate results: this is why this Chapter will be shorter than the others. I have allowed it to serve as a transition between two years that involved lengthy discussions and detailed research results. In 2010 I did not initiate any discussion with the participants. They started approaching me instead. Possibly their own curiosity was aroused by this silent witness. It was then, in the sense that I was – unexpectedly so and up to an extent – free from an obsession with results, that I did take care of this research’s results more.

Among the notes from my field research in May 2010 – which constitute the material that I will be drawing from in Narrative Two that follows – I read:

Instead of being interested in witnessing the Anastenaria, I started being interested in how I am going to walk on fire. I started wanting to walk on fire. I want to.

In May 2010 I did not walk on fire. The Anastenarides claim that the moment someone enters the fire is not decided by the individual but “by the Saint’s call.” As explained in the Introduction, they refer to the Greek Orthodox Saint Constantine, who is being celebrated on the 21st of May.

The Role of the Witness

The presence and therefore the role of the witness of the Anastenaria cannot be considered as a given: this ritual performance, as Maria Louisa Papadopoulou has told me, can take place in front of witnesses or not. It does not depend on them. They

might as well not be there. The participants' presence is enough for it to take place. According to Maria Louisa, this is a major difference to theatre. I am adding (and I am quite confident that Maria Louisa meant the same thing): this is a major difference to theatre whenever it reaches the stage in which a rehearsal period is completed by a performance, or many, in front of an audience.

Her words are confirmed by the information we can draw from the history of the ritual. Ethnographer Konstantinos Romaïos and psychiatrist Anghelos Tanagras met the Anastenarides of Mavrolefki in the fifties performing the ritual on their own in small apartments. They encouraged them to perform it in front of witnesses and protected them from the persecution of the official Church and of the police, whose harsh behaviour towards whatever seemed “not Orthodox” was exacerbated by the cruelty of the Greek Civil War of 1946-1949. Until the two men met the Anastenarides in Mavrolefki there were – at least for a period of some decades – no witnesses to the ritual.

There are currently no witnesses in Meliki, where, as Mina told me, the Anastenaria takes place “behind closed doors.” There are witnesses in Mavrolefki, Saint Helen and Langadas. In any case, what I have observed enables me to assert that for the Anastenarides, at least at the culminating phase of the ritual, being witnessed plays a secondary role. However, the witnesses are the potential new members.

Forbidden Practices

When discussing the inclusion of new members to the community, we need to take into account what practices are allowed and what practices are forbidden to the witnesses (considered here as the potential new members). First of all, observation of

most aspects of the ritual is allowed, while they are discouraged from observing some aspects of the ritual. As it was described in Narrative One, the first time I went to Langadas, Mina Machairopoulou was urging me to leave the *konaki* and come back at a specific time, when visitors would be welcome again. However, in May 2010, as will be described in Narrative Two, as well as in May 2011, I was welcome to stay at the *konaki* for longer. This might have been a sign of my encouragement to participate, or at least of an indication that the participants had gotten used to my witnessing.

Another example. A young man was standing next to the room where the Anastenarides were dancing in order to prepare for the fire in May 2010. He started dancing. Angrily, one of the musicians told him to stop. I am assuming that he must have perceived the witness's dance as being inappropriate or, as the participants demand respect from the witnesses, as disrespectful. For he was not dancing in the same way as the Anastenarides. He was not following the same steps. Probably he also did not have the same intention as they did. Or maybe, to use their language, he did not "have a path." Of course one can wonder on what grounds it was being decided by the musician that he did not "have a path." Is it likely that he did and that his "path" manifested itself in a different way? That the musician misinterpreted his movements? The grandfather could not see him from where he was standing and I wonder whether the musician was experienced enough to recognise who had a path and who did not. However, the witnesses' loud expressions – such as dancing to the music – are not encouraged (if not forbidden) in this *konaki*.

As was also discussed as part of Commentary Three on Narrative One (Chapter Four), it is not only the witnesses' but also the participants' loud reactions

that are not encouraged here. According to what Maria-Louisa told me in 2010, “the grandfather does not allow loud reactions, such as sighing a lot or producing loud sounds.” Interestingly, the Anastenarides in this specific *konaki* in Langadas, one potential root of their name being the word *anastenazo* (sigh) – another one being the word *anastainomai* (resurrect) – are not allowed “to sigh a lot.”

Why is this instruction given? After firewalking has taken place, this rule seems not to be valid anymore, as we will see some loud reactions are allowed or even initiated by the grandfather. On the contrary, Maria Louisa has also told me that at the other *konaki* in Langadas the dance has a more aggressive, war-like feel to it, the participants’ reactions there being loud, extroverted. She added that, in contrast, this specific group she takes part in gives emphasis to the demonstration and the overcoming of physical and psychological pain. Because it does so and despite this prohibition to “sigh a lot” or to produce other loud sounds, she feels that her individual freedom of expression is not being restricted. It is rather being channelled. She adds: “Here freedom of expression exists within a certain frame.” This frame includes quiet.

Dialogical Performance

In 2010 (Narrative Two) I returned to Langadas. As I stated at the beginning of this Chapter, the relationship between foreground and distance changed, I focused more on details, while I was also taking into account that I was not the only one who looked. This change, that included my focus on details and the awareness that I was being witnessed, is reflected in the way Narrative Two was written.

The Anastenarides were, sometimes, watching me too, for their own reasons, that, I suspect, might have to do with a decision – shared by some of them, such as Anastasios Gaitatzis and Maria-Louisa – to consider me as a future participant, and another decision – by Mina – not to encourage me much. I was being noticed, something that I am familiar with, from attending theatrical shows that play with the borders between actors and spectators, as an indication of participation. Or at least an indication of the actor's more or less reciprocated invitation to the spectator to participate. Sometimes a spotlight lighting the spectator's face is involved.

As habit has enabled me to do so, in 2010 I have a conversation with the Anastenarides, not only talking about them, but also talking to and with them. In other words, my methodology is now (now that I am a second-time witness) shifting more towards what Dwight Conquergood has called “dialogical performance”:

[Dialogical performance] struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another. [Its] aim... is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is [a] kind of performance that resists conclusions... intensely committed to keeping the dialogue... open and ongoing... and does not end with empathy. There is always enough appreciation for difference... That is why I have charted this performative stance at the center of the moral map. More than a definite position, the dialogical stance is situated in the space between competing ideologies. It brings self and other together while it holds them apart. It is more of a hyphen than a period. ²

My methodology in 2010 shifted towards the witnessing of the self and the other (the Anastenarides, the participants) “together” while they were being “held apart,” the self maintaining her distance despite getting closer to the other. “The double action of being part of something yet distant from it, too, of being immersed in an experiential reality and being outside the experience.” Then there was the memory of the “rigorous connection” between distance and foreground when witnessing the other's practices and the loss of this memory; the distance and at the same time the

nearness to the participants. The dialogical stance when witnessing the Anastenaria ritual consisted in an attempt to maintain the above balance.

The Second Narrative

The structure of Narrative Two is not the same. I am not using the simple – and simplistic for sure – rule of “first part of the narrative – followed by commentary – followed by next part of the narrative etc.” that was used in Narrative One in order to underline two facts, as I have already stated in Chapter Four: in 2009 I was not only a first-time visitor (who, being constantly surprised, wanted to give some order to what she was seeing when writing about it) but also a first-time researcher to whom a simple, step-by-step structure, could be of help. I will be using flash-backs and free association in order to represent a less step-by-step way of witnessing. The second narrative and the comments upon it are more interwoven.

Furthermore, in 2010 the surprise was not the same, as I did not have to take in the more basic information – such as how the *konaki* looked, how the Anastenarides looked, what their names were or what was the sequence of their practices – and I found myself beginning to understand their rules more, the mechanism and structure behind their practices. For there are certain steps they need to follow and certain rules they need to obey. They need to arrive at a specific time. To accept the *semadi*, the red scarf that is given to them by the grandfather. To dance several times on the carpet before they head towards the pyre. To follow the steps, the rhythm, the style of the dance.

My own relationship to the community of the Anastenarides changed in 2010. Was this due to a new way of looking at their practices, as I was not going as a first-

time visitor but I returned? Could this also be due to a shift from *immunitas* towards *communitas*, now that there was an office to perform, even a peripheral one, only indirectly related to the ritual (washing dishes – this description will form part of Narrative Two)? Was this one more step towards a potential initiation? An initiation that has not happened yet (in 2010) – and it could not be guaranteed that it would happen – because of the witness's (my own) uncertainty in front of a hospitable and hostile community and a potential violent loss of borders? Finally did I, by not becoming an Anastenarissa just yet, enable the continuation of this research while at the same time eliminating the possibility of a practice? If the above were true they could justify to an extent the ambivalence of my role. They will be addressed again as part of the commentary on Narrative Two. They will then be addressed one last time as part of Narrative Three in May 2011.

The *Part* of the Witness

The difference between *communis* and *immunis* at the Anastenaria could be measured by the distance/nearness between carrying out an office and not. There is also a distance, a gap, the lack established after the participants' ambivalent "gift" has been given. The nearness/distance between one firewalker and the other firewalkers, the "borders" between them and the potential loss of them. The above elements have already formed a working definition of the Anastenaria community in Chapter Four.

When witnessing the Anastenaria community in 2010 I was attempting a "double action," my aim was a "rigorous connection between foreground and distance," being both outside and inside this community. One may feel the need to "become a thing," in order to "break the catastrophic spell of things": how can the witness/researcher attempt that? How can one overcome the two threats of too easy

an identification (being turned to stone when looked by the community) and alienation, (turning the community one is looking at to stone)? A kind of mimicry was needed in order to gain at least a “parody of distance and insight.” What was needed was to become a chameleon indeed ³.

The means for me in order to do so was to return to practices I had associated with playing parts at Drama School and in productions in which I took part as an actress and a director, namely: listening; concentration; openness/availability; improvisation; a partly scripted-partly improvised dialogue.

It is in the above sense that I eventually played a part, in the shorter second act that took place in May 2010, the return allowing some space and time for memory to be created. In order to constantly retrieve what was constantly being lost. This “stagey” quality of my witnessing was, again, influenced by and in dialogue with Walter Benjamin’s *One Way-Street* and what follows right after ‘Articles lost’:

Articles found.-The blue distance which never gives way to foreground or dissolves at our approach, which is not revealed spread-eagled and long-winded when reached but only looms more compact and threatening, is the painted distance of a backdrop. It is what gives stage sets their incomparable atmosphere. ⁴

This quality of my witnessing the *Anastenaria* consisted in the perception of this witnessing as a part among other parts and other *dramatis personae*, in that sense too as co-performative and the awareness, the deliberate that lies in this co-performance. This seemed to be a way to maintain, or rather to remember (meaning both to remind oneself and to retrieve) the distance and to facilitate the “double action of being part of something yet distant from it, too, of being immersed in an experiential reality and being outside the experience.” This effort would prove to be a

valuable step towards the third year that included both my participation and the formation of a community of witnesses, as the reader will see in Chapter Six.

Narrative Two, Anastenaria, Langadas, May 2010

Introduction

In this Narrative I talk about dish-washing with the participant Maria Louisa Papadopoulou and how this peripheral practice led to her initiating a dialogue with me, and, among other matters, she suggested that I walk on fire. I then describe how some of the other participants started approaching me too. On the contrary, my attempt to initiate a dialogue with another participant, Mina Machairopoulou, did not produce immediate results. However, when this dialogue occurred, Mina maintained that the Anastenaria should not be investigated but felt, and that there is no link between this ritual and theatre, in that the Anastenaria is much stronger and something that cannot be explained rationally.

Furthermore, I find out that the grandfather is believed to communicate with the ghosts of other, dead grandfathers. The grandfather then invites me inside the room when the Anastenarides are dancing. Even if I want to enter this room very much, for some reason I feel that I should not. However, as the Anastenarides are dancing inside the room, I feel I become more and more grounded and at the same time my head is feeling light. There is nothing obstructing my breath, there is no hesitation. I am breathing freely. I feel my face relaxing, losing any expression. I experience some of the things that can happen to the Anastenarides physically before they walk on fire.

I also find out a link between the Anastenaria and the Kalogeros ritual performance that corroborates Katerina Kakouri's argument that has been discussed in Chapters One and Three. The resurrection theme included in the Kalogeros is now connected with the Anastenarides: the etymology Anastenaria/resurrection sustained by one of the participants in Chapter Four is acquiring a further corroboration.

The grandfather kisses me on the cheeks and then he kisses my hand: I find out that this sequence of movements signifies equality (I am equal to you by kissing you on both cheeks) and submission (I am submitting to you by kissing your hand). Maria Louisa and Pantelis Christopoulos tell me that the grandfather must be thinking of me as a future participant.

This Narrative's conclusions are the following. 1) In 2010 I avoided asking the participants too many questions that would reveal an eagerness to find out their "secrets." As a result, I found out some valuable information that I might have not been able to find out if they had sensed that I was interested in their "secrets." I maintain that my methodology might be one of a pretender, pretending that I am not interested in their secrets, only in order to find (some of) them out and then reveal them in this text. 2) Three participants gave me some signs/clues that one day I might become a participant too. 3) Even if I was feeling attracted by the fire as if it was a magnet, I resisted this impulse. What stopped me was that I wanted to remain true to my part as a witness/researcher, fearing that if I entered I would not know how to handle this text, how things would look "from within" this group, or what things I would want to talk about. However, I became part of the community, not only through these peripheral and visible "offices" assigned to me, but also because of the way that I was affected. 4) I also argue that it is the participants who do not only embody/enact

the ritualistic practices fully but also initiate them and that they are therefore vital parts of the community that can exist without the co-performer witnesses. 5) I then mention a romantic approach shared by some artists, intellectuals and theatre practitioners who approach what they see as popular or traditional culture as a means to return to the origins that will purify and invigorate their thought and craft. I explain that what I will examine in the next Chapter are the ways (and the terms) in which my own return and participation in May 2011, for the first time accompanied by and together with a community of witnesses, sheds new light upon the central question of this thesis. Namely, under what circumstances and through which lens(es) can the Anastenaria be considered as a surviving ritual performance, despite the signs of elimination.

A Year Later

It is the evening of the 21st of May 2010. The Anastenarides have walked on fire and they invite me to have dinner with them. Maria Louisa Papadopoulou tells me that they do not invite all the visitors. I eat silently. Then, as the empty dishes are many, I help the women take them back to the kitchen. Maria Louisa is washing the dishes. I ask if I can help. I don't particularly want to befriend her for the purposes of my research, not consciously at least, but the dishes are many and I do not want to let her wash them on her own. We wash them together and as the kitchen is tiny our bodies touch each other. I follow her instructions. She is responsible of the sponge while leaving the rinsing to me. Her system helps us wash them very quickly.

In the morning of the second day, the 22nd, Maria Louisa starts speaking to me. She asks me if I would like to walk with her on the other side of the street where the *konaki* is. We will not be in front of the others there. This year, as opposed to last

year, there will not be a discussion where all of them – correction: most of them – are present. I do not ask for one and it will not happen. There are only tete-a-tete discussions. Most of them, like this discussion with Maria Louisa, with one exception, are not planned.

After the first unplanned discussion with Maria Louisa that would be followed by two more, some of the others start approaching me. Asking me questions. Maybe it is the fact that they saw one of them talking to me that makes them want to talk to me too, because one of them showed some signs of accepting me. There might be an element of mimesis involved. They might also feel more comfortable because they remember me from last year. They normally start a conversation about the Anastenaria and then I ask them some questions. I keep notes from these discussions. Sometimes I have my notebook with me and sometimes I tell them “one moment please” and I go to fetch it.

In the morning of the third day, the 23rd, Maria Louisa and Mina who would go to the thermal springs of Langadas invite me to swim with them. In the afternoon Maria Louisa and I take a cab and go there together. We have a coffee. Maria Louisa tells me I must walk on fire. I tell her I do not know if I could. We enter the building where the thermal springs are. We go to the changing rooms.

Mina has already arrived. She has taken off her clothes and she is wearing a swimming suit. She tells us that, until recently, men and women would swim in the same thermal spring. She used to come here with Babis Papadopoulos. I have to descend a tall staircase wearing this swimming suit in order to swim. There are some more women looking at me doing so. All the women wear a swimming suit. I become more self-aware because of the proximity of our bodies when Maria Louisa

approaches me inside the thermal spring in order to speak to me. The distance between us is breached now, and this makes me feel uncomfortable. Mina looks at us and swims in the opposite direction. Mina wishes to keep the distance between us and even make it bigger.

Mina was my contact last year and the reason I came here in the first place. She is the only one I have asked to reply to some questions on the *Anastenaria* this year. This approach has not been effective so far. Mina has kept postponing the meeting. She has postponed it four or five times so far. I will not ask her again. We are inside the thermal spring, naked together.

The thermal spring is very big. She keeps swimming in the opposite direction to where I am. I am sometimes swimming towards her direction, as if I have forgotten all about our postponed discussion, then I find myself a few metres from her. I smile and swim all the way back to where I was before, so that she does not think I want to discuss with her and come “closer” to her and that’s why I swam all this way. Participant observation and parody at the same time. When we exit from the spring and we are drinking some water to keep hydrated, she tells me she is too tired but she might speak to me later today.

While Mina is having a shower, Maria Louisa tells me that Mina has told her that the grandfather communicates with the ghosts of other, dead grandfathers. According to what Mina has told her, this has been documented and there is a tape with these discussions somewhere.

Mina and I leave together. It is in the car on our way back to the *konaki* that she speaks to me. She says that in her opinion the *Anastenaria* should not be

investigated but felt, and that there is no link between this ritual and theatre (I had told her briefly that I will be asking questions on this relationship in my thesis). She says that the Anastenaria is much stronger and something that cannot be explained rationally. That it is a mystery and that in her opinion there is no point in discussing it or trying to make theories out of it. I tell her that my teacher, the actress Katia Gerou has told me that one link between the Anastenaria and theatre could be entering an ecstatic state. Mina's face lights up. She admires Katia a lot. She says: "Well, there might be some things." Her expression changes again. "But if I were you, I would stop. I also came here to investigate and then stopped, as there is no point investigating these things."

Mina and I return to the *konaki*. It is late in the afternoon of the third day and some of the Anastenarides I have not spoken with yet come to me and say: "You are not going to ask me questions?" I ask them. They talk to me. Then they dance inside the *konaki* in order to prepare to walk on fire. (They walk on fire twice, once in the evening of the 21st of May and once in the evening of the 23rd.)

Today there are many visitors. The grandfather invites me inside the room where the Anastenarides are dancing. I want to enter this room very much. I do not enter. For some reason I feel that I should not. I am still standing by the entrance of the room. I cannot see all of them and not all of them can see me. Babis, who had spoken to me a lot last year but not yet this year, can see me from where he is standing in order to catch a breath after dancing.

As the Anastenarides are dancing inside the room, I feel I become more and more grounded and at the same time my head is feeling light. There is nothing obstructing my breath, there is no hesitation. I am breathing freely. I feel my face

relaxing, losing any expression. Yesterday Maria Louisa told me that this is among the things that can happen to the Anastenarides physically before they walk on fire. I can see Babis looking at me. He is looking at me as if he can see through me. I hide behind a tall man. When I look again, Babis is still looking at me.

Later that night, I ask him if he has some time to speak. After they have walked on fire and we have had dinner and while I am washing the dishes with Maria Louisa, he comes to the kitchen to find me. When this task is over, Babis and I sit outside the *konaki* and we smoke. He talks to me about the Anastenaria.

Babis: I am beginning to understand more and more who is being affected by the ritual. I have not managed to know who “has a path” (who is ready to walk on fire) yet but I think I can see who is affected. If I ever sense who has a path, I will have reached my goal.

I change the subject. Babis then tells me of a time when he had the honour to be asked by the grandfather to accompany him to Mavrolefki. The Kalogeros ritual was being celebrated there. From what Babis says this is a very happy and loud ritual, celebrated by the whole village. People drink wine. They dance to cheerful songs. The grandfather took him by the hand and secretly led him to a house. There, while the loud and happy songs of Kalogeros were being sung outside, the Anastenarides were singing their dark, sad songs behind closed doors, in secret. Without the presence of witnesses. I write down what he says.

This information corroborates Katerina Kakouri’s argument, discussed in Chapters One and Three, of an existing link between the Anastenaria and Kalogeros that, according to her, is a purely theatrical ritual. It is through that link that she sustains that the Anastenaria’s root is theatre via the Dionysiac rituals. Kalogeros is a seasonal fertility ritual based on a pattern including an agon, the duel between two

antagonists that is also present in ancient drama and that, here, represents the positive and the negative spirit, the death of the former and his comic (phallic) resurrection because of which George Vizyenos, Kakouri and others have claimed Dionysiac origins ⁵. The resurrection theme included in the Kalogeros is thus connected with the Anastenarides: the etymology Anastenaria/resurrection sustained by one of the participants in the last part of Narrative One (Chapter Four) is acquiring a further corroboration.

Loud music is heard from inside. Babis and I go back to see what is happening. One of the musicians who was accompanying the Anastenarides' dance with the *daouli*, has also apparently brought with him a guitar, a microphone and speakers. He now plays the guitar, singing well-known, mainstream Greek songs that are normally sung in night clubs. I sit down. I can see Maria Louisa and Mina disapproving of it. This is quite a change compared to the "bare" sound of the *daouli*.

However, the grandfather, who had sustained last year that he is resisting change, looks happy. Babis tells me "I have never seen him this happy." The grandfather's eyes are shining. I fear that he might be this happy because he will die soon. I can see one of the Anastenarisses, his wife, approaching him. Her face is ugly, she is fat but her body is beautiful. This sixty five year old woman is dancing in the most sensual way I have ever seen. She and the grandfather are now dancing together, the grandfather undressing her with his eyes. In a while, the musician – who is around sixty years old, with dyed, black hair – stops playing the guitar. Babis, another female witness and I leave. Babis drives us to Thessaloniki, where I am staying for the night.

The next morning I return to Langadas to spend the morning there, meet Maria Louisa and leave with her and Pantelis Christopoulos. They will drop me somewhere

on their way back and I will be able to get the train to Athens from there. Maria Louisa asks me if I would like to join her at a theatre festival in Istanbul. I tell her that I would love to but I cannot. We go to say goodbye to the grandfather and his wife. When we are about to leave, the grandfather kisses me on the cheeks and then he kisses my hand. I remember he had done the same last year.

When we are in the car Maria Louisa tells me that he normally does not kiss the visitors' hands. She tells me that this sequence of movements signifies equality (I am equal to you by kissing you on both cheeks) and submission (I am submitting to you by kissing your hand). She and Pantelis tell me that the grandfather must be thinking of me as a future Anastenarissa.

Commentary

During my second visit, I avoided asking too many questions that would reveal an eagerness to find out "the secret" of why the Anastenarides' feet do not get burnt or other "secrets." I wanted to convince the participants that I was not approaching them for the reasons they are usually approached. As a result, I found out some things, some information (for example, on the tape with the discussion between the ghosts of dead grandfathers and the current, living grandfather as well as on the indoor/outdoor coexistence of the Anastenaria and Kalogeros in Mavrolefki) that I might have not been able to find out if they sensed that I was interested in their "secrets." Their reaction to that might have been an attempt not to reveal but to conceal. Only when the trust that one's secret will be safe has been established, one might risk revealing it.

My methodology might be one of a pretender, pretending that I am not interested in their secrets, only in order to find (some of) them out and then reveal

them in this text. Is my methodology also that of a traitor? I hope not. I trust that if they wanted some things to remain secret they would not communicate them to me, as they know that I am writing everything down. I also know that I was probably more interested in them than in the things that I would find out from them.

Furthermore, for some reason the grandfather, Maria Louisa and the doctor do not want me to feel just as a witness. These three members of the community give me some signs/clues that one day I might become a participant too. I also suspect that Babis understood it when I was affected by their dance. This is probably why he talked to me about his ability to understand who gets affected. At the same time, Mina is definitely not trying to make me feel welcome – at least as long as I continue writing my PhD on the Anastenaria. I do not know what she will say if I tell her that I want to walk. She might then become as positive as the others.

Even if I want to enter their group, to do the things they do; even if when I am waiting for them to come outside so that I can see them walk on fire, I am feeling attracted by the fire as if it were a magnet, I resist this impulse. I do not speak to anyone about it and therefore, on a personal level, I do not risk being rejected by them – if they tell me “you do not have a path.” I do not walk on fire. Not yet.

Maybe what also stops me is that I want to remain true to my part as a witness/researcher: I fear that if I enter I will not know how to handle this text. How would things look “from within” this group? Or what things would I want to talk about then, also taking into account that the Anastenarides (are allowed to) communicate some aspects of what they do while other things (have to) remain secret? I cannot even be sure whether I will want to talk about the ritual at all, as after seeing them walk on fire (both in 2009 and 2010) I did not want to speak.

Maybe the above is also a personal fear in the face of losing myself, my individuality, my own “borders,” a fear not only in the face of walking on fire but also in the face of walking on fire with them and therefore sharing a gift and experiencing a lack, by entering this community of firewalkers. This could be a preconception, a superstition almost about the role of the researcher, that I need to abolish remembering Conquergood’s liberating words on co-performance, as recounted in Soyini Madison’s *Critical Ethnography*:

As Conquergood (1982b) states: “The power dynamic of the research situation changes when the ethnographer moves from the gaze to the distance and detached observer to the intimate involvement and engagement of ‘co-activity’ or ‘co-performance’ (pp.12-13). Dialogical performance means one is a co-performer rather than a participant-observer. It is to live in the embodied engagement of radical empiricism, to honor the aural/oral sounds that incorporate rather than gaze over. 6

What has been said about my gradual rapprochement with the participants, that involves being a candidate participant (see the grandfather’s kisses and his invitation to the room where the Anastenarides were dancing, and Maria-Louisa’s and Pantelis’s suggestions that I am being considered as a future participant) as well as washing the dishes, swimming with them, in that sense performing with them some “offices” (only if washing the dishes in which they eat the animal that has been sacrificed or soaking in hot water as a preparation before walking on fire could be considered as part of the Anastenaria offices, even the peripheral ones) could help to produce a more accurate idea about the role of the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria ritual performance.

I become part of the community, not only through these peripheral and visible “offices” assigned to me, but also because of the way that I am being affected. When looking at them nothing obstructs my breath. I am breathing freely. The ones who participate experience the same things at the same time as I am. In addition, their free

exhalation extends into a sigh. The *munus* that this community shares isn't having, it is taking in, breathing in, keeping for a few moments, then breathing out with a sigh. However, it is the participants who (each time) do not only embody/enact the ritualistic practices fully but also initiate them. They are therefore vital parts of the community that can exist without the co-performer witnesses.

What I want to examine below are the ways (and the terms) in which my own participation, my own "intimate involvement and engagement" occurs when I return to Langadas, in May 2011, for the first time accompanied by and together with two first-time witnesses, and what that facilitates.

Chapter Six

THE ANASTENARIA THROUGH CO-PERFORMATIVE WITNESSING IN MAY 2011: PARTICIPATION, SURVIVAL AND A COMMUNITY OF WITNESSES

Introduction

Thus far witnessing as a co-performance of return has led to the conclusion that the Anastenaria community incorporates the constant change and elimination that can be traced in the participants' and the witnesses' practices. Furthermore, the survival of this ritual performance seems to be in dialogue with the repression and the return of violence. Co-performative witnessing in 2011 will get one more step closer to the wished-for "double action" of experiencing while at the same time reflecting on the experience, an idea that forms part of the theoretical framework used in Chapters Four, Five and Six and described in Chapter Four.

This co-performer witness is also a theatre-maker used to analysing movement and text in ways which include paying attention to detail, actions, conventions, habits and *dramatis personae*. What happens when two more witnesses enter the dialogue in 2011, Maria-Lisa Geyer and Josh Hoglund? They are theatre directors: this influences the ways in which they observe and speak of the Anastenaria, as the reader will become aware of in Narrative Three that follows.

Chapter Six is a reflection of Chapter Three on the relationship between the Anastenaria and aspects of performing for the stage. The development of such a discussion serves as a lens in order to examine my central question: whether and under what circumstances the Anastenaria can be considered as a surviving ritual performance. The discussion continues in the following ways.

1) First of all, the texts and the themes of the ritual performance are in dialogue with dramatic texts and themes of Classic tragedy/comedy as well as with dramatic texts of the twentieth and twenty first century Western theatre. A focus on

such texts serves here as an argument that supports the survival of the ritual performance.

2) Secondly, in May 2011 I became a participant. The details of this participation form part of Narrative Three. There, I am getting closer to the ritualistic practices, getting “in their midst” in a quite literal way, by taking part in some of them. Through the story of an affected witness who became a participant, I continue examining the question of survival of the ritual performance.

My point of view changed in 2011, at least literally during the time that my official participation lasted. However, this participation did not include walking on fire. I argue that there are different levels, superior and inferior, of initiation, akin to what happened in the Dionysiac rituals, where, according to Heraclitus there were many *narthecoforoi* (people holding the thyrsus) but few *bacchoi* (people inspired by the holy frenzy). I give an account of how such participation took place. It remains to be seen how it has affected this research’s outcomes.

3) Thirdly, Narrative Three has the form of a dialogue. It incorporates my own observations but also the observations of my two companions, Josh Hoglund and Maria-Lisa, two first-time witnesses. Dialogical performance in the Anastenaria therefore included these voices too and their stories become the ones of mediated witnessing. These two witnesses became the other two main *dramatis personae* of the Narrative, in the sense that they are expressing themselves with their “own” voices.

However, those are not voices recorded with the help of a tape recorder or edited by them, but rather the fruit of my effort to render the main elements of what they said and what they let me know that they felt and thought. Furthermore, this

experiment's aim was to render a certain kind of split of the co-performer witness, now becoming a kind of a group in dialogue: a community of co-performers/witnesses.

What this choice facilitated, among other things, was to allow the focus of my "character" to be the narration of my own participation. The two other "characters" focus was: the description of a first-time witnessing of the Anastenaria practices (Maria-Lisa Geyer) and a brief albeit essential analysis of these practices (Josh Hoglund). These three voices are interrupted by penetrating comments by the participant Maria-Louisa Papadopoulou and a discussion with the participant Pantelis Christopoulos.

Witnessing and Participation

Witnessing as a dynamic co-performance of return leads to the conclusion that the survival of the Anastenaria community incorporates the constant change and elimination that can be traced in the repetition of the participants' and the witnesses' practices. I mean here both the repetition of the ritual performance as a whole or of a specific practice over the course of three years, as well as the repetition of a practice from one day to the next or during the same day. Furthermore, this survival is in dialogue with the repression and the return of violence. Co-performative witnessing in 2011 gets one more step closer to the wished-for "double action" of experiencing while at the same time reflecting on the experience.

This witness is also a theatre-maker used to analysing movement and text in ways which include paying attention to detail, actions, conventions, habits and *dramatis personae*. The other two witnesses who enter the dialogue in 2011, Maria-

Lisa Geyer and Josh Hoglund, and one of the participants, Maria Louisa Papadopoulou, are theatre directors too. This affects the ways in which they engage with the ritual: their openness, their focus, what they pay attention to and the links they make.

In May 2011 I became a participant. In Narrative Three, I focus on more details of what happens during the Anastenaria practices as well as what happens during the breaks between these practices. I am also getting closer to them, getting “in their midst” in a quite literal way, by taking part in some of them.

At the same time, this third narrative has the form of a dialogue that incorporates my own observations as well as the observations of my two companions, two first-time witnesses who experienced a “more rigorous connection between background and distance.”

In Narrative Three the return of the earliest picture becomes clearer in the form of my two companions’ observations during their first-time witnessing. They experience their own earliest pictures which I am using, unable to fully restore my own. In other words, one of this Chapter’s main focuses is the dialogical development of the witness’s struggle with the relationship between distance and nearness.

Inclusion

The witnesses’ presence is important for the continuation of the ritual, as the current participants began as witnesses. However, Maria Louisa Papadopoulou had told me in 2010 that “Normally they do not want to include new people.” Probably by “they” she meant Anastasios Gaitatzis, the grandfather, or the grandfather and some others who take part in the decision-making process. This use of “they” might also

mean that she does not take part in this process, at least not yet, as she is among the new members. “They” could also stand for a kind of mask/disguise of “we,” due to her reservation towards someone who was still not completely reliable.

Still, her use of the word implies that when the new Anastenarides get accepted by the group they are not being assigned the same tasks, they are not all sharing the same responsibilities, etc. Especially when Maria Louisa suggested my participation to Mina in 2011 and a day later Mina officially decided it, in front of the other participants and the witnesses, it became clearer to me that their status was different. Probably the longer they are members of the group, the more their individual relationship to the grandfather and the other members as well as to the individual offices they are being assigned evolve and in that sense the deeper their adherence to the ritual performance becomes. Such evolution might play a role in the feeling of more permanent appurtenance to the group.

Furthermore, one must not identify this inclusion with firewalking, as it has been stated in Chapters One and Three. A villager of St. Helen near Serres claimed to my mother in 1978 that he was an Anastenaris although he had never walked on fire. The mere fact that he was walking around the fire was enough to confer on him the status of participant. I will prove that there are different levels, superior and inferior, of initiation. How does the inclusion, the initiation take place? Is anyone excluded? The members of this group are friendly and open. If we take into account what Maria Louisa said, they also seem reluctant to include new people. These questions are addressed in Narrative Three that follows.

The inclusion might also depend on the witnesses too; their approach and their actions. Maria Louisa had told me when I had asked her about this process in May

2010: “A girl had come to witness the ritual for the first time and she started crying. Then she left, even if she “had a path” (meaning she was ready to walk on fire). I am not experienced enough to see who has a path. The grandfather has the ability to understand it. Whoever really wants to participate will do so.” This could be taken to mean that whoever “has a path” can potentially be included, even if “normally they do not want to include new people.”

It may also mean that the acceptance by the group depends on the individual’s will and actions up to a certain extent. When the participants believe that someone does not have a path, s/he seems to be excluded, automatically, by their practices. As was discussed as part of the third commentary on Narrative One (Chapter Four), there is a need for mutuality between “it” (meaning a force, or the Saint’s will, or the fire) and the individual. Furthermore, it is the chief Anastenaris who needs to detect that this mutuality is happening, validating it and giving his permission before the new member can walk on fire.

The Third Narrative

Narrative Three is probably the most ambitious of the three: through it I am trying to incorporate not only the participants’ stories but also three different witnesses’ stories: my own, and my two companions’ – and first-time visitors. This method of witnessing and participating in the Anastenaria practices during this third visit takes my dialogue with Dwight Conquergood’s approach of dialogical performance a step further. In ‘Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance,’ Conquergood argues:

The strength of the center is that it pulls together mutually opposed energies that become destructive only when they are vented without the counterbalancing pull of

their opposite. For example, good performative ethnographers must continuously play the oppositions between Identity and Difference. Their stance toward this heuristically rich paradox of fieldwork is both/and, yes/but, instead of either/or. [...] Moreover, they respect the Difference of the other enough to question and make vulnerable their own *a priori* assumptions. [...] Glassie insists that the ethnographer's home culture should be as open to interpretation, questioning, weighing of alternatives, as the host culture. ¹

My method of witnessing and participating during this third visit problematized the oppositions between Identity and Difference. On the one hand, my companions are theatre practitioners too and people who, on different occasions, have been in close contact with me. Their countries, the UK and New York, became a new home to me after leaving Greece. Their home cultures are cultures I studied. On the other hand, these cultures are different from my home culture that includes the Anastenaria.

Secondly, they had never witnessed the ritual performance before. Their presence would enable me to question and make vulnerable my own *a priori* assumptions: in 2011 I was witnessing a ritual performance I had looked at before, while my two companions were looking at it for the first time. I had to introduce it to them. We also found ourselves sharing and sometimes claiming the same space and the same people's attention at the same time. Sometimes this facilitated my research, while at other times it created challenges.

Thirdly, my role evolved from that of a witness who is in dialogue with/watching primarily the participants to a witness who is also in dialogue with/watching other witnesses. In the text that follows these witnesses become the other *dramatis personae* of the narrative, in the sense that they are expressing themselves with their "own" voices. Those are not voices recorded with the help of a tape recorder but rather the fruit of my effort to render the main elements of what they

said and what they let me know that they felt and thought. In a way this experiment aims at rendering a certain kind of split of the person of the witness, now becoming a group in dialogue, or a community of co-performers/witnesses.

In this narrative I am using three different voices: I edited the material my two companions shared with me (when we were in Langadas and later on via e-mails) and I combined it with my own edited diary. Dialogical performance in the Anastenaria ritual therefore included these voices too and their stories became the ones of mediated witnessing.

Finally, in 2011, apart from being a more experienced witness, I became a participant too. My point of view changed, at least literally during the time that my official participation lasted.

Narrative Three, Anastenaria, Langadas, May 2011

Narrative Three includes but is not limited to the following elements. Remembering my method of witnessing in 2010, I ask Maria-Lisa Geyer and Josh Hoglund not to speak much to the Anastenarides or to me while we are at the *konaki*, but to observe and keep notes instead. I talk to them about the participant Babis Papadopoulos' wish to have witnesses who are respectful "to the people, not the faith." Normally the Anastenarides wear dark clothes. I ask my companions not to wear too bright or provocative clothes, but something as dark and neutral as possible.

Even if I thought that the procession to get the sacrificial animal happened every year, I see that the animal is already at the *konaki*. It seems that the sacrifice of the bull has been forbidden by the authorities on the grounds that it is contrary to hygiene rules. This is why, today, the bull is being slaughtered in the slaughterhouse

of Langadas. No doubt other motivations can be seen behind this excessive care for hygiene. The participants listen to the Mikrokonstantinos song through an old radio cassette player. They sing on top of the music. They forget some of the lyrics.

Maria-Lisa narrates to me the discussion she had with Pantelis Christopoulos on his participation. After wanting to walk on fire for years, Pantelis was finally told by the chief Anastenaris that he was ready. The force he felt then made him cry for a long time. Kostas Gaitatzis asks the three of us to walk on the earth on which they will light the fire. My two companions enter the room and watch the Anastenarides dance, but I hesitate to enter.

Maria-Lisa narrates that the beats of the drum and the repeated movement of the dancers, the warm light and bright colours and the lingering smell of the incense affect her. She narrates the technique that relates to the dance on the carpet, noting that the dancers are principals to the scene while the musicians have a supporting role. She also describes her great need to dance and maintains that it must be no coincidence that a lot of folk music makes great use of chromatics and jarring harmonies, which can be sensual, stirring, penetrating, disturbing, transporting one to a different state of consciousness.

The participant Maria Louisa Papadopoulou asks the other participants for the lyrics of the Mikrokonstantinos song. I maintain that this has to do with the fact she is a professional actress and director. She says the Anastenaria has something to do with cleansing the spirit and allowing a person to face their inner torments/sadness. She also asks me: “Why don’t you walk on fire? You don’t want to?” I tell her I might be avoiding what I want the most. I then miss the practice of firewalking and an opportunity to take part in the ritual performance. I narrate to Maria Louisa

Papadopoulou my observations from the previous years in Langadas and she comments on them, informing my definition of a technique in relation to the Anastenaria that formed part of Chapter Two.

Then, I narrate how each time I see the icon of Saint Constantine I feel something in my chest. It's as if something is coming towards me and grabbing me by the chest. I feel that I am being pulled by it. Maria-Lisa Geyer narrates how during the dance she is being affected too: her breathing changes and she has to force herself not to abandon herself to the rhythms and unite with the participants. After the music stops she does not want to talk anymore. She then describes the firewalking, which reminds her of actors moving through a space, feeling the space and each other instinctually.

Then I narrate my participation that is marked by the *semadi* that is placed around my shoulders and ends when the *semadi* is removed. In the end, the chief Anastenaris' son tells me: "It is different to participate."

Josh Hoglund narrates his experience and maintains that the breaks between the practices give the Anastenarides space to let the mystical resonate with them as individuals. He says he received the most concrete display of power and belief after the firewalking in the final dance back in the *konaki*: "the firewalking is the turning point, the final dance is the release – the synthesis of all the introspection and anticipation is now funnelled through the body." To him this final dance was an acknowledgement of a shared experience that was both common and deeply personal. This juxtaposition was for him the motor that drives the Anastenaria forward.

20th May, Evening

I arrive in Thessaloniki. Maria-Lisa Geyer, a young British theatre director and a former collaborator of mine, is also in Thessaloniki. She has already arrived. I take a taxi to Langadas. I call her. I ask her not to meet in Thessaloniki and go to Langadas together, but to meet in Langadas instead, by the central square. I want some time to think how I am going to behave this time: I will try and use her presence for the benefit of my research and, beyond that, my relation with the community. I will give her some assignments. Josh Hoglund, another young theatre director from the United States, will join us later today.

Maria-Lisa: I arrive in Langadas and meet Ioli in the bandstand in the central square after taking a bus from Thessaloniki. We walk at sunset to our hotel, somewhat out of town, to where the baths are situated. Our walk takes us past golden fields abloom with poppies. The road itself lines with trees. We catch up. I am informed that a young theatre director from New York will be coming too.

Ioli: This hotel is much better than the one I stayed at in 2009 and 2010. We leave our stuff. As we are on our way back to the central square of Langadas, we hear from some people on the bus that the Anastenarides are going to walk on fire tonight. I am surprised as both last year and the year before they did not walk on fire on the 20th. I am not sure I believe it. Maria-Lisa asks me what I want us to do. I find it difficult to decide for both of us. It is eight o' clock. I tell her it is better to have something to eat, that it would not be worth it going to the *konaki* for half an hour or so.

We find the tavern that I have been to every year. I remember the people who work here. They remember me. I also see three old men, who were among last year's witnesses. One of them is conducting his own research on the Anastenaria, as an independent researcher. His hair is white. They invite us to witness the firewalking with them. I ask them to which *konaki* they will go to. They reply that they will go to the other one, not the one that I go to. Maria-Lisa asks me what I want us to do. I suggest that we sit down and eat our food.

I am saying to Maria-Lisa that I will not tell her much about the Anastenaria now, as I want her to witness it as a newcomer, a first-time visitor, without any prior knowledge. Remembering my method of witnessing in 2010, I ask her not to speak much to the Anastenarides or to me while we are at the *konaki*. What if she observed and kept notes instead?

M-L: Ioli decides not to tell me much about what will happen over the next few days so as not to influence my observations of which I am to take note of as homework, like a diary.

I: We go back to the hotel. Maria-Lisa falls asleep. It is midnight. I go to swim at the thermal spring. They give me the same pool we had swum in with Maria Louisa Papadopoulou and Mina Machairopoulou last year. I am alone in it. I am thinking "Another stage is bare, and I'm standing there, with emptiness all around." The Anastenarisses are not here. I know they will be here tomorrow, in the afternoon. They will have a bath before they go to the *konaki*.

Josh will arrive in a while. We will all be staying in the same room. It was cheaper to do so. Maria-Lisa is asleep. Josh is late. When he arrives we drink a glass

of whiskey at the canteen that is still open. I am asking him not to speak much to the Anastenarides or to me tomorrow, but observe instead, keep notes and then give them to me. He agrees too. We go to sleep.

21st of May, morning

I: While we are having what Josh calls the typical Greek breakfast (coffee and cigarettes), I talk to both Maria-Lisa and Josh about the participant Babis Papadopoulos' wish to have witnesses who are respectful "to the people, not the faith." I suggest as a way for them to witness the ritual performance not to ask the Anastenarides too many questions, to observe silently and keep notes. We could all share our thoughts after we leave the *konaki*. They agree.

Normally the Anastenarides wear dark clothes. I ask my companions not to wear too bright or provocative clothes, but something as dark and neutral as possible. Maria-Lisa wears a simple blue dress and sandals and Josh wears a blue shirt and a black pair of jeans. I am wearing a blue pair of jeans, a white shirt, a black raincoat and boots. Bringing only my boots was a mistake. It looks like the beginning of a warm day.

M-L: We take a taxi. We walk around for a bit as Ioli has to remember which is the right street but eventually we find the right house. An earthen track leads to the house. The track is lined to the left with some sort of low building and to the right with a plot of land with vegetables growing. There are also some chickens pecking around.

The house lies just beyond the building to the left and as we come upon it an old man happily greets Ioli. He shakes her hand and she introduces us to him. He is

the leader of the group. We go into the house and meet an elderly lady – his wife. We sit in the small entrance hall. The wall to the right is covered in photos of the ritual and firewalking. A little table in the middle has a calendar with pictures of last year's ritual and a little basket for an offering. Behind the table is a little wooden window. The seats are covered in brightly coloured woollen knitted cushions.

A doorway to the left leads off to the main room. A bench runs around the walls covered in coloured fabric with knitted cushions. The white washed walls themselves are decorated with embroidered cloths with pictures and flowers and hanging is an embroidered "Our Father" in Greek. On the left corner of the left wall facing into the room is some sort of conical stove. On top are little ornaments and to its right is a candle holder, brass, waist height and filled with sand like those I have observed in Orthodox churches. This is next to an elongated makeshift altar that runs the rest of the width of the room. Covered with red fabric it holds various icons enframed in silver. Attached, various ex-votos in the shape of hands. Above in the corner on the right of the altar is a corner cabinet that holds more icons. The floor is covered in brightly coloured thick carpets. Reds, mostly.

I: I do not know how they will greet me, as I have not notified them that I would come. I greet the grandfather. He seems happy to see me. Mina is also here. I introduce her to Maria-Lisa and Josh. She is happy to meet Josh. We also see Pantelis Christopoulos, the doctor. He is very warm. He says he would have liked to hear from me in the past year. I ask for his e-mail so that I can write to him this year. Maria Louisa Papadopoulou and Babis Papadopoulos are not here. I ask whether Maria Louisa will come. Pantelis tells me that Maria Louisa is not feeling very well and that she might not come. I ask him what time they will go to get the animal. He says that

this will not happen. I am surprised. I thought this happened every year, but the animal is already here.

M-L: We came for the procession but Padalis tells Ioli that this year it will not take place. Ioli says perhaps the reason is that the old man is getting older.

I: The animal is white. Its body has a weird shape, the back feet being much taller than the front ones. It looks as if it has not been taken care of during its brief life, something that, as far as I know, is rather against the custom, which imposes particularly good treatment of the future victims. It looks dirty. I look at it for a long time. I think of Rosinante, that ill-looking horse. At some point it approaches the wall of the *konaki*. It sort of sits down, the right part of its body and its face abandoned against the wall. Is it awaiting the end? There's something melancholy about this face. It's in the eyes. Is it wondering about something?

M-L: Ioli shows me a little lamb, tied up to the side of the house, trying to get away. All of us stand and sit outside, chatting but also observing the little lamb. Sometimes he nibbles. Sometimes he is bored and so sits down. He is very cute. I try not to get emotionally involved so I do not get too close or pet him as I otherwise might have done. It dawns upon me suddenly that this is the sacrificial lamb. The sacrificial lamb that Jesus was. The imagery used in so much Christian art. The innocent lamb led to the slaughter by wolves. The lamb sacrificed for the Passover. The lamb of the Bible. I realise the significance of this little animal. We will be taking part in something with an iconography that is ancient, certainly over 3.000 years old, from the time of Moses. We are becoming involved in something that will link us with so many people over so many generations.

I: Now the grandfather's son, Christos Gaitatzis, takes the sheep to the back garden and kills it. This time no one observes the sacrifice. All the participants are all inside, dancing on the colourful carpet. This time there is no live music. They listen to the *Mikrokonstantinos* song through an old radio cassette player. They sing on top of the music. They forget some of the lyrics. I go outside with Lefteris Chronidis' daughter, a seven year old girl, and Maria-Lisa. We want to see the sheep. It is dead now. A few metres away I can see the raw meat of a bull, metres of raw meat, covered.

Ten years ago the sacrificial animal was still a young bull, one of the animals linked with the cult of Dionysus in ancient times and a sacrificial victim in other places such as the island of Lesbos in contemporary Greece. The bull was brought close to the *konaki* and tied to a tree. Then at a certain moment the man who had the task to kill it gave it a single blow with a kind of long knife, the blow aimed behind its neck where very important nerves are situated. The blow made the animal fall immediately on its four knees and remain motionless. The bull was then immediately killed and skinned. The head was cut off and placed in a separate bucket and the meat was prepared for the dinner that would take place on the same day, after the firewalking. Not only adults but also children were allowed to watch. It seems that the sacrifice of the bull has been forbidden by the authorities on the grounds that it is contrary to hygiene rules. This is why, today, the bull is being slaughtered in the slaughterhouse of Langadas. No doubt other motivations can be seen behind this excessive care for hygiene. (The information in this paragraph comes from a discussion with Maria Louisa which took place a day later).

M-L: The old man tells Ioli that the vet would not let them kill the bull because it was too big so they had to have a professional do it. The fresh carcass of the bovine is laid out on the table of the terrace and covered in a table-cloth. It has been skinned. I can see the muscles attached to the bones and the face of the animal.

I: Josh, Maria-Lisa and I sit very close to the raw meat. Two men arrive (they come from Albania, they live in Langadas and, as people from Albania in many parts of Greece, have for the past years – before the recession hit – been the ones who do the most tiring jobs using their hands). The two men go towards the raw meat. They start cutting it into little pieces. It takes them a long time. The three of us stare at it. Mina asks whether we would like some Greek coffee. Josh and I say we'd love some. Maria-Lisa does not drink coffee. Mina prepares the coffee, she serves us and then she leaves, saying she will return in the afternoon. Some of the Anastenarides will go to give part of the raw meat to the neighbours. We drink coffee and look at the meat.

M-L: The lamb would not feed all for the next evenings but the beef will. At certain times, some meat is put into plastic bags. Ioli confirms this will be going to neighbours. I watch the chopping up of the meat as I have never seen it done before and I miss such contact with the meat I eat. The meat comes away from the bones easily – I have never seen such a sharp knife before. They also clear a massive bone with the round bits of the joint connections luminous in their whiteness. It is the stereotypical bones of those given to dogs in cartoons. The ribs are hacked into pieces and all of this fresh meat is divided between the best bits, the parts less edible but good for a stock and those to be thrown away. I ask if we pay a contribution for the meal in the evening. Ioli replies: "No, the Anastenarides offer this." She confirms that we will be invited for the meal for the next two evenings.

I: Maria-Lisa asks me how come I do not mind looking at the blood. She reminds me that two years ago, when I was helping her shoot a short film in Germany, I had to drip fake blood on the snow. I had fainted after the task was finished. I am afraid of blood, probably having inherited this phobia from my grandmother, a nurse on the mountains of Albania during World War II. She was unable to attend an operation, because she fainted at the sight of blood. On the contrary, she did not care to stay with those who were too heavily wounded to be transported during the bombings of the Italian air force. I feel dizzy. I go a few metres away. Christos and his wife offer to drive us back to the centre of Langadas. We get in the car. I ask him why the procession did not take place. He says the sheep from the house they used to go to was too expensive this year. Someone else brought them a cheaper one.

21st of May, evening

I: We go to the thermal springs with Josh. Maria Louisa Papadopoulou is here. It is 5.30 pm. We kiss on the cheeks. She tells me that even if she had a problem she decided to come. Maria Louisa asks if we will swim that late. She tells me she herself is going to the *konaki* now. She leaves. Josh asks the cashier in English about the price for two people. She tells him. I am not paying attention. We must go to the *konaki* now. The three of us take a taxi. I wonder if Babis Papadopoulos will be there too.

We arrive. Pantelis welcomes us. Babis is not here. I do not ask why he did not come. The three of us are standing outside the *konaki*. Maria-Lisa and Josh ask Pantelis many questions. He replies. I am listening. I cannot think of something to ask Pantelis. In fact, I do not want to ask him anything. If it was the two of us, he would talk to me and I would then ask him a thing or two. The discussion continues. I exit

the yard of the *konaki* and sit outside a neighbour's house. After a while Maria-Lisa comes and sits beside me. She tells me the entire discussion she had with Pantelis. I open my notebook. I write.

Discussion between Maria-Lisa and Pantelis:

M-L: Where are you from?

P: Thessaloniki.

M-L: How did you get into this?

P: I came a few times. The first time I felt something with the music, the beat. I came again and again. At some point the chief Anastenaris told me I was ready. When the old man says you are ready then you are ready. The force I felt then made me cry for a long time. Do you know Asia Minor? They used to do the same there.

M-L: How exactly did you get into this?

P: I was born in the area. I had heard of the Anastenaria but I had not seen it. I came and watched it for the first time as a student. I felt a connection with the music. Twelve years ago I came again. I watched it. I liked it. Then I forgot about it. In 2004 I came again. I am a believer, but then I was getting angry towards the Saints and God. While I was watching them walk I felt something on my cheek. At home I discovered a beauty spot. I felt bad I had been angry. I came back and I got introduced to them. Personal problems came back and I forgot again. One night I was with my wife and the rest of my family. I demonstrated the dance to them. It felt good. I said: "I want to do this." I came here and I asked Kostas Gaitatzis if I can take part. Kostas

told me that I was not ready. He said that in order to participate someday I would have to watch them and sing with them for ten years.

I: My discussion with Maria-Lisa gets interrupted by Kostas. He needs us to walk on the earth on which they will place the pieces of wood and light the fire. We walk on it. We stomp on it. We abandon our weight to it. Now I am mimicking Kostas' movements, barely lifting my feet off the ground. Now I am walking fast, with tiny steps, on the ground that will receive the pieces of wood and the Anastenarides' feet. My boots, Maria-Lisa's sandals and Josh's trainers touch the same spot that their bare feet will touch. In a couple of hours. The Anastenarides thank us. I explain to Maria-Lisa and Josh that this is something the Anastenarides do not ask everyone to do. It means something. I am convinced.

The drum calls the Anastenarides inside – the musicians have arrived. They dance on the carpet. My friends enter the room and watch them. I do not enter. I do not want to disturb the participants or claim the space more than I have already done. I watch from the other room. Other witnesses come. They push me in order to get a better view. A man standing next to me is pressing his right elbow against my left shoulder in order to record with his camera. We maintain the position for a long time. After he has finished recording he smiles apologetically as if he noticed just now. Five Anastenarides exit the room and the *konaki*, one by one. We all follow them. They light the fire. They go back. We follow them back. They take a break.

M-L: The first time I go towards the house there are so many people that I can just about peek through the door. There is live music, which I am happy about. They used a cassette earlier in the day for the hand washing and Ioli said that was the first time that had happened. An old man sings and plays the tiniest of violins on his lap (a

lira) and there is a drummer who keeps time – using a traditional type of beater, reminding me of drums in Ireland. A wooden beater with a round knob. The group is dancing. Every twenty minutes or so. They walk up and down in a steady rhythm. Always keeping to the beat with their footsteps. Often there is some sort of turning of the body from one side to the other. A sort of continuous swivel from side to side. The music is repetitive. Over and over again the same tune plays. There seems to be some sort of refrain as the dancers often join in with this, singing about Constantine. The melody repeats, repeats with different ornamentation from the liraist who is also singing the song, and the beats of the drum and the repeated movement of the dancers, the warm light and bright colours and the lingering smell of the incense all make the atmosphere heavy and I can imagine that the participants can strongly feel this. I have to stop myself from moving my legs in time with the beats.

I: Josh, Maria-Lisa and I speak with the Anastenarides during the break. After a while we hear the drum calling them back inside. The dance starts again. I am determined to get a better view this time. I arrive at the door of the room. I stand still. I do not enter. I hear the music. I see Lefteris' head. He is standing still. Maria Louisa's hands and hair. I hear Mina whistle: 'ssssssssssssssssss.' Christos, the grandfather's son, looks at me from the corner the grandfather used to stand in 2009 and 2010. With his intense, focused gaze. Now they stop dancing one by one. Maria Louisa and Mina are the last ones to stop. I go out. Josh and Maria Lisa follow me. We talk.

M-L: We talk a bit with Ioli and Josh. The next dancing, I manage to find myself a seat. They and indeed some of those watching stand as one participant lights some incense and wafts it in front of the participants who make the sign of the cross.

Others watching do the same. As the incense is given to some other participant to put away they kiss each other's wrist in their special handshake.

The music starts again. The dancers start when they are ready. I notice that not all start at once or together. It seems an individual thing. Some watch at first, and join the dancing a bit later. Some start straight away and then stop before most of the others are finished. Some dance in socks, others barefoot and others in flipflops. Some "get into it" very quickly, others not.

After a while, the dancers come to pick up the icons and dance with them. Those who do not receive the big heavy silver encased icons have a little red scarf with an ex-voto/s sewn on to it; these then are brought into the dancing. The scarfs swivel with the dancers, the icons too but also jingle into the air (they are held on sticks) and ex-votos clang against the silver giving off a bell like sound. When a dancer is finished (often tired) they give the icon to the old man who has not been dancing – kissing the wrist kiss – and the icon/scarf is restored to the altar. The icons which have remained on the altar or placed back already are kissed in typical Orthodox fashion.

Some dancers, particularly the two younger women, have a great stamina, and often during the dances it is always these two who are the last ones left. It seems that the musicians take their cues from the dancers and always continuing until the last dancer decides it is enough. Only on one occasion does the music come to an end forcing the last dancer to finish and come back to the altar to kiss the icons. Otherwise it is very much the dancers as principals to the scene.

From when I was able to have a seat in the same room, I appreciated the designs meant to heighten the senses. The candles glowing to the left of the altar. The coloured wall hangings covering the washed and cold white of the walls. The many carpets and seat coverings in warm colours, predominantly reds. The icons with their glistening silver. The smell of the incense, the repetitive music and the heavy beats of the drum which penetrate the depths of the body. Each time I observe the scene, the more I feel it enter me and I feel a greater need to join in and dance. It must be no coincidence that a lot of folk music makes great use of chromatics and jarring harmonies, which can be sensual, stirring, penetrating, disturbing, transporting one to a different state of consciousness.

I: Outside. Many more witnesses have arrived. They are standing by the string that surrounds the pyre. Waiting to see the firewalking. Families, mostly. Maria-Lisa and I invent this game. We say whether the women we see come “from the city” or “from the countryside.” There is a woman with high heels and dyed black hair. She is wearing a tight beige shirt, a pair of tight beige trousers. “Countryside.” Josh looks at us. I remember he was born in the countryside. I tell them we can go back to the *konaki*. We see Maria Louisa sitting outside, holding a piece of paper. She is asking Pantelis and the musicians for the lyrics of the *Mikrokonstantinos* song. Maybe this has to do with the fact she is a professional actress and director.

M-L: Padalis tells me it was when he cried that he was allowed to join them. The lady of the first day (Ioli's friend) and Maria Luisa also spoke about this crying that came from nowhere brought about by the music and watching. Maria Luisa is also a theatre director. She watched the first day, cried the second and was allowed to take part on the third. Maria Luisa is very interesting to talk to. She says she thinks

the Anastenaria has something to do with cleansing the spirit and allowing a person to face their inner torments/sadness. This explains the need to cry certainly. I would add to this the sacrifice of the lamb and the washing of the hands before the ceremonies begin. The music, penetrating the body, also helps.

Maria Luisa also says she had gone to Turkey and learnt to become a whirling dervish. She says whirling feels like the body is at one with the whole universe. I say there must be similarities between whirling, the Anastenaria in Langadas and the Dionysiac rituals as, if we trust the elements of the vases and reliefs depicting Maenads, there is this element of turning. Obviously the dervishes turn. The dancing in Langadas also has this element of a turn in the movement and looking at Classical depictions of Dionysiac rites, there is often a figure turning, their body twisted in spinning quickly to one side, one leg raised and holding the *thyrsos*.

I: Maria Louisa now turns to me, speaking in Greek: “Why don’t you come inside the room? Why don’t you walk on fire? You don’t want to?” I tell her I might be avoiding what I want the most. We hear the drum again. The Anastenarides go back inside. This must be the last time they will dance. Even if I have just been invited, I do not realise it and I still doubt whether I am welcome inside at this stage, so I stand outside and wait. Josh and Maria-Lisa who had gone inside come outside. Josh tells me that Kostas told him it would be better if we went by the pyre and tried to find a good spot.

There are many witnesses. I hesitate. I lift the string that surrounds the pyre. I pass underneath it. Maria-Lisa follows me. We pass in front of the witnesses who were already standing here. They shout at us. A man shouts “Where do you think you are going?” I tell him “It’s ok. Relax. I just wanted to watch.” I go back. Maria-Lisa

follows me and says: “You shouldn’t have left. You should have insisted.” I tell them “I will see you both in a bit.” I leave. I want to be on my own.

M-L: Ioli, Josh and I are told to wait outside for the dancers to process out of the house so as to find a place to stand. The fire is now burning embers. It is very hard to see as there are so many people. Somehow by the end I find myself in the front row. The musicians lead the procession. Lira and drum. Followed by a participant who holds the incense goblet – but who never takes part in the dancing and indeed will not cross the fire. Everyone dances around the fire first and then crosses it and dances over it, some stumbling at the embers. This is fascinating. It is nice to see the old couple take part in this dance as the lady was mostly cooking and the old man is very old and so did not do all the dancing during the day. It is interesting to see how quickly they “get into it.”

I: A few minutes have gone by. I decide to go around the block and reach the pyre from the other side. Time passes and I know I risk not seeing the firewalking at all. Many people are there too. I finally find a spot behind a few bushes and many heads. The Anastenarides arrive. I can only hear the music. Now I can only see the icons, lifted. A pair of hands. The top part of a candle. The witnesses around me keep moving. I am making a big effort to maintain my balance, to keep my two feet on the ground. The firewalking ends. I go to the other side.

Josh sees me. He walks towards me. He says nothing. He looks at me with a sweet gaze. I tell him I am contemplating leaving. I do not want to stay for dinner. I feel that my research has failed, as I did not manage to watch the firewalking. I tell him that he and Maria-Lisa can stay. He says it would be lovely if I stayed and polite towards the Anastenarides. Pantelis, Kostas, Maria Louisa pass in front of us. They all

invite us to the dinner. I will stay. We have dinner. Gradually the impulse I had to leave, enacting a parody of Daniel Day-Lewis' departure from the stage during his "Hamlet incident" that has been discussed in Chapter Three, fades away. Maria-Lisa helps the other women to serve the food. She was asking to be allowed to do so since this morning.

M-L: After the firewalking has finished we all go back to the house. They dance for the last time. They then recover for a few moments before we have dinner. We set up another two carpets on the "dancing room" floor and we give to each setting a cloth napkin, cutlery, and a glass. We place olives, tomatoes, feta cheese and water in the centre. The participants and invited guests stand around this large central space. Incense is burned and wafted around to everybody, who with their hands waft the scent towards them and make the sign of the cross. A bottle of Ouzo is handed around. Starting with the old man, each person says a wish to health and has a swig. Then everyone sits on the floor or on the benches around the room. Bread and beef stew is handed around. After dinner the space is cleared and we all line up to have water from an ewer poured over our hands – the same as we did before the sacrifice of the lamb earlier today.

I: When the dinner is over, Maria Louisa, Maria-Lisa and I wash the dishes. I tell Maria Louisa that I am writing about her method of washing dishes in my dissertation. She tells me to be closer to them tomorrow. Today they were looking for someone to hold the candle while the firewalking takes place. She suggested that I do it, but I was not around. They gave the candle to someone else. I start washing the dishes more slowly. Maria Louisa tells me that it is not good that I am not expressing my desire. She asks me what my PhD is about. I want to give her an efficient answer.

I talk to her about a few observations I have included in Narrative One (Chapter Four) and I'm trying to wash the dishes faster, as she wants to get the washing done. This is her reply, her rhythm of washing unaltered:

M L: What you said on the uncertainty implied by the steps forward and back while we were dancing on the carpet is interesting. At the same time each small step is a small way for us to increase our energy. The smaller and the steadier the steps one takes are, the more her/his energy gets focused and in that way preserved. In general we try to increase the energy and not waste it. We try to preserve it instead. It's as if we grow bigger inside. I liked very much what you said on forgetting the lyrics as a sign of the elimination of the ritual. However, bear in mind that the song is not normally sung by the dancers. The singers used to know it very well and the dancers used to learn it through the repetition. As you might have noticed, when, earlier today, the songs were being sung by the liraist, the lyrics were half-remembered. However when the twenty-seven year old singer joined us, he sang the whole song, adding lyrics I had never heard before. This was very encouraging, even if the words, the text can be restricting for us as well as for the stage actor. I agree with you that one should pay attention to every moment of the ritual and not focus only on the firewalking. And I have to say that another reason we sometimes do not remember the lyrics is that we do not observe the ritual since we were children, as it used to happen a few decades earlier, when all the Anastenarides in Langadas came from Langadas too. Now the text risks being forgotten if we do not choose to remember it ourselves.

I: Maria-Lisa is behind my back, demanding that I wash the extra forks and spoons she has put foam on. It is soon over. Pantelis tells me that at some point, when

he was dancing, he looked at me and he felt that I was one of them. We go back to the hotel. Maria-Lisa goes to bed. Josh and I have a glass of whiskey.

Ioli: Last year my research went really well. This year it's going really badly. I find it harder to concentrate when you and Maria-Lisa are around. And I had asked you not to speak much, to just observe. Maybe I am not brave enough, not doing what I want to do (walking on fire).

Josh: At least you know what you want to do. What I find hard is to understand what I want to do. I-

I: I am shy.

J: I often lose my stream of consciousness.

We order one more whiskey.

I: The good thing is that the Anastenarides really liked you and Maria-Lisa. We just need to find a secret sign so that you both understand when I would like you to leave. Let's say that when you see me asking you for a lighter, you will know it's time to get Maria-Lisa with you and go.

J: I might think you are asking me for real.

Sunday the 22nd of May, morning

I: While we are having breakfast again – a bowl of cereals, a cup of tea and an orange juice for Maria-Lisa, coffee and cigarettes for me and Josh – I tell them that today I will go and do some work at the internet café. Then we can all have a bath at the thermal springs. Maria-Lisa decides to stay at the hotel and read a book. Josh joins

me at the internet café. We then go back to the hotel where we meet Maria-Lisa. We have a bath. Maria-Lisa and I at the female pool, Josh at the male pool.

While we have one more coffee I tell them that when we go to the *konaki*, I will use the secret sign when I want them to go. I ask them not to speak to me much when we are there. I also ask them not to speak much to the Anastenarides, because I do not want them to get annoyed. I ask them not to tell me their discussions with the Anastenarides while we are at the *konaki*, but to keep notes instead. We can discuss what they observed and found out later. Josh says that he is not going to avoid me. This would be ridiculous as the space is too small and as we are all leaving tomorrow. This makes sense as he lives in New York and I do not know when I will see him again.

22nd of May, evening

I: Maria Lisa, Josh and I take a taxi and go to the *konaki*. Today I am determined to be inside the room in which they dance as much as possible.

M-L: While waiting before the dancing starts I try my first Greek coffee. Surprisingly as a person who does not like coffee, I like it. This probably has something to do with the amount of sugar it contains. Josh tells me he does not like Greek coffee due to the dregs at the bottom. When I see the dregs, they lead me to believe that they are sweet like chocolate. I am deceived – horrible. Ioli has given Josh and myself instructions to not talk to her this evening as she does not want to be disturbed in her observations and research (as we did chat the whole evening before). I must admit Ioli is the first one to break this rule but we are more careful and I try not to disturb her too much. I am to observe and get the participants to talk to me without

seeming too inquisitive. Something along these lines. We find out that they are talking to us openly and that they are not reticent to answering questions.

We enter the brightly coloured room. The participants, a few relatives or family members, a young American/Greek and the three of us are the only ones present and it is a lot more intimate without the throng of tourists who had come the evening before. The tone is different and the whole thing takes on an air of seriousness. One participant lights the incense and wafts it around; at the icons, and in front of those present who bring it to them and make the sign of the cross.

I: I am there every time they dance, sitting on the same seat, having found “my spot.” The third time they dance, a young girl is sitting next to me. Her eyes are shut. I can see her torso move while she is breathing. The Anastenarides look at her. Will they ask her to join in? Something else is going on too. Between me and the icon of St. Constantine. Each time I see it, each time the person who is holding it is lifting it in a way that I can see it, I feel something in my chest. As if a rural postmodern Eros was throwing an arrow towards me. It’s as if something is coming towards me and grabbing me by the chest. I feel that I am being pulled by it. I stand still, I do not move. I do not leave my seat. I look around me hoping that the grandfather will see me from where he is standing and invite me to the dance. He cannot see me and I cannot see him. I can feel Maria-Lisa next to me, breathing heavily. I know she is affected too. The Anastenarides might pick her. If it happens, it happens.

M-L: This time the two drums really start to beat inside me. My breathing changes and I have to force myself not to abandon myself to the rhythms and unite with them. I find it oppressive. The heavy beating, the bright colours, the repetitive dancing. I start to feel emotional. I long to jump and dance with my being inside the

air of drums and candles and incense. I want to abandon myself to it and let my soul dance outside of my body. The music stops suddenly. I just sit there feeling very emotional. I might cry. I hold back any tears. It is a relief when the drumming stops. The silence of the air makes me aware of myself again. I have to be in silence. I do not want to talk to anyone.

After a while, the lady (Ioli's friend) asks me if I am alright. I cannot really give her a coherent response. She is watching me intently. I say the music was really powerful, especially with the two drums. That I felt I wanted to dance. That my breathing changed. She looks at me. "It made your breathing change". Her eyes glisten and nod in a knowing glance with the lady opposite her, across the room.

I need to be alone and in silence so I stay a bit longer in the room. I still feel very emotional and a strong reflection about my previous wrongdoings or thoughts occurs. I am sorry for them and feel a strong desire to be a better person. I remember that Maria Luisa had mentioned that she felt the Anastenaria had a connection to spiritual cleansing, as seen from the fact that it makes people cry. I need a walk and to be alone and reflect a bit.

I: I see the icon again for a few moments and I feel this thing. Then the icon disappears. Then the icon appears again and I feel the same thing, more intense this time. The icon disappears. When it appears again, I can feel a secret muscle around my lips moving. I don't know if this movement is visible to the others. It's on the right side of my mouth, between my lips and my right cheek. It is moving. It is dancing to the music. I feel grounded. Unable to move anything else but this muscle which moves without my being able or wanting to control it. The Anastenarides stop

dancing. We go out. It is less crowded today. Last night two buses were here full of people who had travelled all the way from the Peloponnese to witness the ritual.

We go back inside. They dance again. Each one of them dances in her/his own way but they all follow the same rhythm. They are discussing something. Mina calls my name. I stand up. "Ioli, do you want to hold the candle?" "Yes, I do." They also call another name. "Alexis." Alexis is a young man with really long dark hair. Christos, the grandfather's son, fetches a *semadi*, the red scarf that all the Anastenarides wear. He puts it around my shoulders. I feel I become taller, bigger and stronger. He puts another one around Alexis's shoulders.

We go together to the Anastenaris who is holding the candles, the one who had driven us to the square of Langadas. I take a long, white, broken candle. It is lit. "Alexis, do you know what we will do?" "No." The Anastenaris tells us we just have to follow him and do whatever he does. We are about to exit the *konaki* now. They will walk on fire. "Alexis, do you want to go first? Go first and I'll be following you." "No, let us walk side by side." This is weird, I have not seen this before, normally they walk one by one, not in pairs. We exit the *konaki*. We walk towards the fire. I am thinking. A young man and a young woman. Walking towards the fire together. I remember the lyrics of Leonard Cohen's *Joan of Arc*, her getting married to the fire:

(...) "And who are you?" she sternly spoke

to the one beneath the smoke.

"Why, I'm fire," he replied,

"And I love your solitude, I love your pride."

"Then fire, make your body cold,

I'm going to give you mine to hold,"

saying this she climbed inside
to be his one, to be his only bride.
And deep into his fiery heart
he took the dust of Joan of Arc,
and high above the wedding guests
he hung the ashes of her wedding dress. [...]

The *Mikrokonstantinos* song is heard instead. With my peripheral vision I can see Josh watching me walk. Next to him I can see Maria-Lisa watching me too. I hope they take a picture of me standing here, this time not among the witnesses, but on the other side. I do not look at the witnesses. I look at the Anastenarides who walk on the coals. I am very close to them, for the first time this close. I am holding the candle. I do not move my hands at all. I do not want to draw any attention to myself. Alexis is moving next to me, he is dancing on the spot to the rhythm of the music. I am standing still, completely grounded, immovable again. We both wear shoes. They are barefoot. They walk on the coals. On the same earth. On the same spot where Josh, Maria-Lisa and I had walked a few hours ago.

M-L: The music and singing fills the air and the group first of all circles the fire. They are separate to us. They are connected: after encircling the fire a few times they start walking across it. Their bare feet touching the burning woods. The old man simply, dignified, walks straight across. The younger men walk, I would even say stamp through the fire with vigour and passion. The two younger women dance furiously over the burning underfoot. They are wonderful in particular to watch with their enthusiasm and bodily energy.

I start to notice that more or less only one or two cross the fire at any time. The others hold back in the circle. It looks choreographed in the best way: through instinct. Their proportion of time and space is perfect, in the sense that in Greek tradition “it was most just”: it feels “right.” The performers pay attention to the fire, but they are connected through sense to themselves and to each other. They remind me of actors, during games or exercises that are devised to bring the group together to create a company. When actors move through a space, feeling the space and each other instinctually. They seem as one. I understand better the connections Ioli talked to me about, between these dancers of the ritual and actors in the theatre.

I: They press their feet hard against the coals. They want to put out the fire. They manage to do so, almost completely. For the first time I can see so clearly that their feet touch the coals for a long time. This is a form of *pyrostasia* (standing on fire). When they stop walking there are not many lit coals left. Alexis and I are invited to join them in the circle they make around the fire in the end. We all walk next to each other, around the pyre, holding hands. We then all go back inside, followed by some of the witnesses. The Anastenarides dance for a while. Christos takes the *semadi* off my shoulders. I feel bereft. We eat. Kostas makes sure that Josh and Maria-Lisa get everything they want to eat. He makes sure their plates are filled again and again. He makes sure they get feta cheese, tomatoes, olives and bread. We then wash our hands and our faces with the holy water.

M-L: We join the group for dinner again. This evening I think we all feel more accepted as part of the group. The “table” on the floor is set more quickly and we all take our places. The dinner and we are blessed and then the Ouzo bottle is passed around again starting with the old man. He says a blessing or wishes everyone good

health, takes a swig and the bottle is passed around the room. Meat stew again with bread, feta, olives and tomatoes. After the table is cleared we stand in a queue to be ritually washed with the pitcher over our hands to finish off the meal.

I: Maria Louisa, Maria-Lisa and I, wash the dishes again. Josh comes to help but Kostas sees him and does not allow him to do so saying: “This is not for you.” Then Josh and I go outside. Christos is here. The chief Anastenaris’ son. He asks me: “How did you feel?” I reply: “Thank you.” He says: “It is different to participate.” Maria Louisa tells me she had suggested me to Mina yesterday. Mina apparently remembered today and she called my name. We sit outside. The grandfather asks Josh what he thought. Josh tells him and Pantelis translates. Josh tells the grandfather that, to him, it is not only the firewalking that is important. Watching the Anastenarides dance inside was stronger. What follows below is a synopsis of Josh’s response combined with my own comments in square brackets.

J: I think the music and dancing, the whole thing really, is designed to create space for a common cathartic experience by allowing quick shifts from the ceremonious, deeply personal experience that demands a look into one's personal beliefs to a common social space that is more casual. [I’m thinking: Just beliefs or also desires, fears, temperament? I mean you don’t face death or extreme danger with beliefs.]

In the case of the Anastenaria this social space that might be seen as beside the point, is a necessary piece of the structure of the entire thing. [I am thinking: Of course it is not beside the point. Ritual is anyway a collective activity.] I believe the episodic nature of the event helps enrich it. Togetherness is formed over the mundane cup of coffee after a portion of trance-like dancing and familiar transportive music

[I'm thinking: Familiar to whom? The Anastenarides, the witnesses? Josh? Because at least none of us usually hears that kind of music.] During this cup of coffee, one of these many short breaks between the music and dancing in the *konaki*, friends easily transition to talking about things outside of the ceremony. The unsaid, unspoken power of what has just concluded in the *konaki* is present, in limbo, like a cloud that hangs over the break. Each person has had their individual experience and is given this “down time” to process it as it develops throughout the ceremony. This repetition in the ceremony and outside the ceremony, I think, grounds the complex, unarticulated emotions of the participants.

What interests me: The cycle of ceremony. The rhythm of being in the dance and outside of it is something I find unique and surprising. Whether conscious or not, I believe it serves a purpose. It would be easy to think of these breaks in the forward motion of the “official” aspects of the Anastenaria as an obstacle to reaching catharsis. Instead, it bespeaks the trust the Anastenarides have in each other and the ceremony itself. The breaks give the Anastenarides space to let the mystical resonate with them as individuals. Suspending time makes the episodes of ritual grounded in their individual lives and their casual interactions. [I am thinking: The very element of the passage from an active state, like dancing in the ritual or performing a part on stage to a comparatively trivial and neutral one, like the Anastenarides’ pausing for some chatter and coffee or the actors disappearing backstage and “becoming themselves” for a while, constitutes an interesting analogy between the Anastenaria ritual and performing for the stage. Although such passages, such transitions are quite common, an investigation – neurological, psychological, social – would be worth it.]

The “gratification” of walking on fire and the ecstasy that it might bring is delayed; withheld. The desire for this catharsis, this ecstasy, is unspoken but more and more present. The actual firewalking is when this heightened sense peaks... it is a public display of faith and trust. But for me, as an “audience member” - if I can say that without sounding too crass - I certainly felt more like a houseguest and finally perhaps a friend.

I received the most concrete display of power and belief after the firewalking in the final dance back in the *konaki*. The firewalking is the turning point... the final dance is the release – the synthesis of all the introspection and anticipation is now funnelled through the body. Finally the mystical and the mundane seem to merge with great joy and celebration. It was still reverent but charged – the room was electric. But there was more eye contact, laughter. Bodies seemed to work together without effort. The final dance was an acknowledgement of a shared experience that is both common and deeply personal. This juxtaposition is to me very beautiful in its mystery and the motor that drives the Anastenaria forward. The final dance of the evening was deeply felt by different individuals in different ways, but it was facilitated by group love and trust of both the Anastenaria and of each other.

I: The grandfather looks pleased. Kostas, on his way to leave, tells me: “See you in July.” Nobody had invited me to the Anastearia in July before. I want to go. After we have exchanged e-mails again, I say goodbye to everyone. The grandfather does not kiss me on the cheeks this time. He is not kissing my hand either. He just shakes my hand. Pantelis drives us back to the hotel. I ask him in Greek – therefore in private, as Maria-Lisa and Josh are present but they do not speak Greek – if the fact that this time the grandfather did not kiss me in the way he used to do, means that he

does not want me to be part of the group. Pantelis replies in English – including my friends in the conversation – that the grandfather is old and that I probably feel guilty too easily like all Greeks.

M-L: Some of the dancers go home but some of the men go to sit outside on the veranda later joined by the women who wash up. It is very relaxed. We all chat for a bit and then it is time for goodbyes. It is moving to see how much we have become part of their group. The women in particular are sad to see us go and we hug them. Maria-Luisa and the other lady (Ioli's friend) say we must keep in touch and the latter asks me to come back. I say I want to and that I want to dance. She tells a few people around her enthusiastically. I say I want to come again and bring my mother too, as she would find it very interesting. I thank the old lady in German and shake the old man's hand. I take one of their calendars with photos from the previous year on it and put a little donation in the basket.

Synopsis of the Commentary on Narrative Three

There are new developments regarding the key elements that formed part of the theoretical framework of Chapters Four, Five and Six. Foreground and distance. When returning for the third time, what I saw was profoundly affected by habit. I was familiar with all the participants and with the sequence and the content of the practices. At the same time, I was surprised by new things that occurred, by eliminated practices such as the procession that did not take place. Maria-Lisa Geyer was a newcomer. She was surprised by what was happening. Her description of a first-time witnessing was in dialogue with my own third-time witnessing. The change in the relationship between foreground and distance as described by Benjamin cannot

be taken for granted when observing the Anastenaria ritual performance. It is shifting, including steps forward and back.

Another eliminated practice was the act of killing that was not witnessed by the participants. I ask how is the balance of the community affected when the violence “itself” is not being seen. I clarify my use of the word violence: violence of the community, violence of the witnesses and ritualistic violence. I argue that such violence coexists with expressions of ‘love,’ in the sense of giving, sharing, taking care of and paying attention to in a surviving ritual performance that flirts with forgetting and elimination.

I maintain that discovering and underlining the forgotten/repressed elements of the Anastenaria ritual performance corresponds to another narrative within the narrative, namely the narration of the repressed myth of the familial clashes contained in the Anastenaria lyrics/text. This unexpectedly leads to the reinforcement of the links between ritual performance and theatrical performance: the eliminated, forgotten, repressed elements lead to a new and unexplored dimension of this relation.

I argue that the Anastenaria performs a shift from extreme violence (infanticide, cannibalism narrated in the lyrics of the song) to lesser, less uncontrolled and more mediated violence which now seems to be becoming more and more eliminated (for example: the animal sacrifice). I maintain that in case the sacrifice’s rules are not respected, the community risks entering what Girard has called the sacrificial crisis: communication with the “heavens” and the world of the dead is interrupted 2.

The discussion on the community in relation to Esposito continues (the Anastenaria community in dialogue with: “*communitas – immunitas*”, “a violent loss of borders” and “the gift”) 3. There were borders at stake, not only between the participants and the witnesses but also inside the community of witnesses. Furthermore, Maria-Lisa and I witnessed the “gift” the Anastenarides were giving and we were affected by it. And all three of us experienced the “release” Josh spoke of, during the final dance that followed firewalking. After such experiences, Maria-Lisa lacked the words to speak – as I did too in 2009 and 2010. And after experiencing it for the first time from a different position, after having worn the *semadi*, I felt bereft when what had been given to me was suddenly and with no warning taken away.

There was also an important shift in my relations with the community of the Anastenarides. In May 2011 I was invited to participate in the ritual performance. I did “performatively engage” with them as a participant and through this I continued witnessing 4. This more active part of my co-performance that consisted of wearing the *semadi*, walking towards the fire with the Anastenarides, holding the candle next to them, and walking in the final circle with them, allowed me to still be able to watch. This time, I literally watched more closely, while I was also being watched by the witnesses. I conclude that it was different to participate. With the help of Josh Hoglund’s analysis of the ritualistic practices, I argue that when the avant garde theatrical experiments of the past and the present centuries which are in dialogue with ritual seem to neglect the basic idea and practice of participation as including the passage to a non-ritual state, they risk trying to formalistically “turn theatre into ritual” in vain.

The continuation of the ritualistic practices that incorporates their elimination, a community of witnesses as a method of observing the ritual performance, and the encouragement of the community to the witnesses to become participants, constitute conditions under which the survival of the Anastenaria ritual performance is confirmed (each time).

Commentary on Narrative Three

Foreground and distance. When returning for the third time, what I see is now, profoundly, being affected by habit. I am more or less familiar with all the participants, with the sequence and the content of the practices, as well as with the names of both the participants and the practices. This also means knowing more securely when I have to wait, knowing more when I have to do something.

At the same time, I am surprised by new things that occur, for example the fact that the procession does not take place. The animal sacrifice seems to have lost something of its solemnity. The raw meat is being cut in front of our eyes. Sacrifice is being replaced by slaughter. Recorded music is heard during a phase of the ritual performance. Even if it is the third time I attend, I need to claim a seat again and again, no place has been secured for me.

On the other hand there is an important shift in my relations with the community. They receive me in a different way, asking me to do different things. No doubt this is the result of a double-bind evolution connected with the fact that I look at them in a different way too.

Maria-Lisa Geyer's and Josh Hoglund's presence constitutes a new element. This has certainly to do with practical questions also. As their de facto guide I feel I

have to take care of them, paying attention to them and giving them advice. At the same time my priority is my research – and my relation to the community and the ritual performance – so I also give them instructions in order to facilitate this. This results in my being disoriented by the slightest misunderstanding. No doubt there is more: they both belong to cultures not alien to but different from mine. They do not know the ritual of the Orthodox Church, with which the Anastenaria keeps a peculiar relation of difference/affinity. On the other hand, besides our personal relation, they are theatre practitioners, so I keep “spying” on them: I take note of their openness towards the participants, their interactions with them, the details they pay attention to and the ideas they form. I am witnessing them while they are witnessing the ritual performance and at the same time I am being witnessed by them. Focused on my participation, I rely on their eyes too.

Maria-Lisa is a newcomer. She is surprised by what is happening. Like me in 2009, she does not know what the rooms inside the *konaki* look like, the names of the participants, the names of all the practices and their sequence. However, because of her engagement with theatre, art, music and religion, she pays attention to and has the vocabulary to talk about the type and positions of the icons and other visual elements inside the *konaki*, or the precise moments when the participants use the holy water, make the sign of the cross or follow the song.

There are moments when Maria-Lisa’s experience seems to be in relation to a rigorous connection between foreground and distance, as for example when she enters the *konaki* and identifies the different rooms. There are also moments when she seems more interested in/able to focus on details, not taking the background into account.

Furthermore, my familiarity with the space and the people, as someone who returns for the third time, as well as the interest in my own participation, helps me pay attention to details, but I do not always see the “big picture.” The numerous witnesses from the Peloponnese for example who had travelled a long way by bus, had been waiting for a long time around the pyre, had already taken their seats and were bound to react aggressively towards someone who would lift the string and get in front of them, as I did.

I have already mentioned that the participants were using a radio cassette player for part of the ritual. I do not know what would happen if the musicians never showed up, whether the live music and its vibrations are so integral, so vital for the Anastenaria that the participants could not go on with their practices and prepare for the firewalking. However, having heard the participants commenting on it, I am almost certain that the musicians would be more punctual if they were paid more money.

To what extent did the elimination of the procession – for financial reasons too – affect the practices that followed? Again, as with the music, the “main component” was still there. The animal sacrifice did happen. In contrast, the journey towards the animal did not happen. The animal was brought to the Anastenarides and almost nobody watched it being killed. Even if the practices went on, is it likely that a balance in the *community* was affected? There was no journey beyond the borders of the *konaki*. Just the presence of a poor, ugly animal – whose journey was not witnessed and celebrated – as well as metres of meat from a bull that had already been slaughtered elsewhere.

The act of killing was not witnessed by the participants either. How is the balance of the community affected when the violence “itself” is not being seen? When one sees only its “repressed remainder,” as Read suggests, in metres of raw meat 5? When this violence is not accepted – in the sense that it is not embraced by the gaze of its initiators – when the violence is mediated and in that sense undervalued, it might come back uninvited in the form “of ceremony and spectacle,” in the form of two buses full of aggressive tourists, for example 6.

Let me now further clarify the use of the word violence here. During all three of my visits, but especially during the third one, I had the opportunity to realise that physical and verbal violence were often present in this ritual that as the Anastenarides say “is about love.” Present in elements as important as the familial clash that has affected the ritual permanently, namely the argument between members of the same family that has led to the split of the former community. This is what I would call the violence of the community.

Violence is also distinguishable in cases where its agents do not belong to the community I am witnessing, as in the witnesses’ pushing the other witnesses in order to get a better view; the careless use of camera flash that blinds the participants during firewalking; the argument with the neighbour who is afraid that the fire will burn his tree; and some witnesses’ verbal aggression towards the firewalkers. It is the community that becomes the target of such violence and it is noteworthy that the participants’ reaction is impregnated with great calm. This is what I would call the violence of the witnesses.

It is becoming clearer that the above expressions of violence and the ones that follow cannot be considered as homogeneous and apt for the same kind of analysis.

At the same time they seem to be interrelated, as I argue below in this Commentary on Narrative Three. In the case of the treatment of violence within the Anastenaria, which I would call the ritualistic violence, one could state that maybe not having a procession, not seeing the animal getting killed, listening to the music through a cassette player and forgetting the “cruellest” part in the lyrics of the song, all have to do with psychological repression. Not only of the recurring theme of violence present in the Anastenaria songs and in the animal sacrifice, but also of a realisation of the ritualistic violence that is not being observed (animal sacrifice) and the violence of the community that is not talked about (them not speaking about the familial clash). It is noteworthy that violence – in all the above forms: the community’s, the witnesses’, the ritualistic – coexists with expressions of ‘love’: giving, sharing, taking care of, paying attention to etc.

Could this repression, this hidden but existing wound, be just a sign of a dynamic co-existence of “l’ amour et la violence,” as the French songwriter Sebastien Tellier puts it, the in a surviving practice that flirts with forgetting and elimination? As Esposito suggests, “there is no need to hypothesize any sort of former idyllic community, no primitive “organic society”⁷. He adds that there are “two inseparable faces joined in the combined concept of *munus* – gift and obligation, benefit and service rendered, joining and threat”⁸. Maria Louisa’s attempt to write down the lyrics so that she can remember them is therefore linked to her saying, when I informed her that other witnesses were pushing me in order to get a better view, that violence forms part of this ritual, a ritual about love. Maybe this is why the division of the *konakia* happened, she adds. This ritual performance involves grey areas, areas worth exploring, which are not limited to the impressive practice of firewalking. Witnessing

it demands bringing closer, remembering the omitted, the hidden, the unspoken, the eliminated.

The repression dimension opens the question of the dialogue between history: I forget because something is old, has to change, and the self: I forget because I repress something psychically unbearable. One could argue that discovering and underlining the forgotten/repressed elements of the Anastenaria ritual corresponds to another narrative within the narrative (namely the narration of the repressed myth of the familial clashes contained in the Anastenaria lyrics/text) which unexpectedly leads to the reinforcement of the links between ritual performance and theatrical performance. The eliminated, forgotten, repressed elements lead to a new and unexplored dimension of this relation.

Witnessing the Anastenaria turns ritualistic violence into something that concerns the witness, who sees, hears, smells violence – not only the blood but also the excrements from the belly and the intestines of the sacrificed and butchered animal. In this way the Anastenaria is a “precursor” of what Castellucci did in his show *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*, in which a man cares for his geriatric father who shits himself and the audience smells the odor of feces while watching Antonello da Messina's portrait of Christ.

Contemporary societies seem to be engaged in a “worse,” more terrible, yet distant and concealed, masked relationship with violence with the help of ideology and technology, as will be discussed below. However, the tragic theatre used to be putting forward all kinds of textual and performative clashes: psychic, familial, social. This is the essence of the tragic myths according to Aristotle in his *Poetics* as well as the basis of Plato's accusations against epic and tragic poets in his *Republic*:

according to him poets should not make manifest such things, especially when addressed to young readers or spectators 9.

How does theatre organise the relation violence/repression/spectacle? I have already mentioned *Hamlet* (see Chapter Four, Part Three of Narrative One). Claudius conceals his crime and his violent intentions with lies and gentle words. Hamlet “seems” impolite, ironic, unsociable and problematic. He is the one who makes the repressed fratricide return to light. The way he does it is through the staging of *The Mousetrap*, a play within the play. It is interesting that Claudius proves to be quite capable of plotting and perpetrating violence, while at the same time being unable to face it in front of a public.

This discussion is quite complex but at the same time intriguing. When one reads Luis Gernet’s *Anthropology of Ancient Greece* one sees capital or other forms of punishment discussed in terms of public show: crucifixion, hanging, decapitation, etc. which passed from ritual and penal law to theatre 10. This is also a main theme in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* and then Seneca, among others 11. The difference is that when the spectator witnesses this theatrical violence on stage s/he normally does not to experience a sadistic pleasure but wishes Prometheus or Mnesilochus – Aristophanes’ character – to be liberated.

The return to the surface of the repressed – with the violence it contains – is the main theme in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, in Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, in Tennessee Williams’ *Suddenly*, *Last Summer* and in a different way in *A Streetcar Named Desire* 12. On the contrary, the characters of Jocasta, Claudius, Mrs Alving and Sebastian’s mother are striving to keep the repressed away from the stage. Tragic poets do so too.

The relationship between the animal sacrifice and the infanticide narrated in another version of the forgotten Anastenaria song is a far more horrifying one than the one described in Chapters Three and Four. Leaving apart the scapegoat theory, which anyway happens to refer to the Jewish and not to the Greek culture, the Greek tragic texts seem to be reinforcing the links between animal sacrifice and murder. The animal sacrifice which Clytemnestra offers for the victory of the Greeks and the sack of Troy is a premonition and a metonymy for Agamemnon's and Cassandra's murder in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 13. The lengthy bull sacrifice Orestes offers to the gods in Euripides' *Electra* announces the murder of Aegisthus 14. The animal offered at the Anastenaria seems to be a substitute for the young boy killed and dismembered by his adulterous mother in the other version of the Anastenaria song.

The discussion on the inter-relation between the forms of violence defined above seems to underestimate the fact, touched upon in Chapter One, that ritualistic as well as theatrical performance evolves. The Anastenaria ritual probably conserves elements – which Kakouri considered to be “Dionysiac” – dating from very old times. However, although they seem to belong to a temporal dimension called after Fernand Braudel “la longue duree,” they still evolve with time 15. Everything, including the survival of the ritual, is connected with the element of historical change.

What was discussed above could now be linked with the following observation. The violence contained in rituals like the Greek *pharmakos* and the Jewish scapegoat seems to have had a cathartic and also apotropaic objective. It aimed at creating the conditions for a cathartic acting out that would give a free, yet relatively harmless expression of aggressive feelings, and therefore eliminate, control and channel destructive violence. The ancient Greek drama as well as other genres

that have moved in similar directions seem to have made, on another level, a very similar use of elements like *fobos* (fear), *eleos* (mercy) and *pathe* (sufferings and clashes) 16. Part of the evolution of violence in the Anastenaria is eliminating, masking, or channelling violence into ritual performance.

What happens when such performative violence does not serve the rhetoric, values, interests and objectives of the Church and the state? The public slaughtering of the bull has been forbidden by the authorities on the grounds of hygiene, yet one can suspect that there were other reasons too. The animal is killed and butchered in a way very similar to what happens to the young boy, Constantine, whose fate is narrated in the songs that are part of the ritual. One song deals with the theme of infanticide, as it has been mentioned above. It narrates the story of a woman who cheated on her husband while he was away from home. The young Constantine, her son, saw her. She killed him and cooked him. His father returned and she served the cooked meat of Constantine for him to eat. When he was about to eat his son, the cooked meat spoke “from the plates” and told him that his wife had cheated on him and killed his son. In the end the husband kills his wife. However, as I have already argued in Chapter Four on the Anastenaria community and the violent loss of borders, the animal dies because it is supposed to take the place of the human who should not die.

One can probably take into account that Constantine, the Emperor founder of Constantinople and protector Saint of the Anastenaria was the one who had published a law according to which infanticide was the most horrible crime, equal to parricide. In any case, compared to what we know about the ancient Dionysiac rituals (which seem to have in some cases included either human sacrifice, even in classical times 17,

as well as the dismemberment of animals when still alive) the Anastenaria seems to perform a shift from extreme violence (infanticide, cannibalism narrated in the lyrics of the song) to lesser, more mediated violence which now seems to be becoming more and more eliminated (see the example of the animal sacrifice in Narrative Three).

How is such shift enacted? The killing of the animal in the Anastenaria traditionally occurs in the light of day and it is enacted in the close proximity of the participants and the witnesses. Such killing is not simple. It is done according to specific rules. It is difficult and painful to watch. Its smell is unbearable. One understands why in other cases, on the island of Mykonos for example, the slaughtering of the pig (*choirosfai*) that will feed the family during the winter is accompanied with a collective ritual lament for the dead animal. This close visual and other contact with death is the contrary of what regularly happens in the dominant societies of a Western type: one can nowadays kill more people with less trouble ¹⁸. One can do so with a peaceful conscience, with less remorse or no remorse at all. The way this will be articulated, felt and experienced will not be as “real” killing but as collateral damage; humanitarian intervention; a deed for the triumph of the true faith; or in order to protect the common good. One can do it by just pressing a button or giving an order to people s/he will never meet. A few years later repressed violence in the form of some post-traumatic disorder may return ¹⁹.

Rene Girard, in his *Violence and the sacred* speaks of the sacrificial crisis ²⁰. The killing of the sacrificial victim assures the balance of the society that enacts it. This victim plays the role of the scapegoat or the Greek *pharmakos*, upon whom the negative energy threatening the community is concentrated. In this way the danger of dysfunctionality and split in the family and the community is avoided.

This sacrifice also aims at the communication of this world with “heavens” and the world of the dead. Photographs from Saint Helen in 1978, as Maria Louisa Papadopoulou has narrated to me, show that the sacrifice of sheep took place by the edge of a large and especially deep hole dug in the earth which would absorb the blood of the victim, the surface of the earth communicating not only with “heavens,” through the intervention of the protectors Saints, but also with the dead and with sacrifices past. In case the sacrifice’s rules are not respected, the community risks entering what Girard has called the sacrificial crisis: communication with the “heavens” and the world of the dead is interrupted. Pollution can occur. This was, up to an extent, according to the French author, the situation of the contemporary world (as seen in 1977). One could wonder whether the future of the Anastenaria ritual performance, community and practices might not be similar.

In May 2011 I was invited by the Anastenarides to participate in the ritual performance. I did performatively engage with them as a participant and through this I continued witnessing. This more active part of my co-performance consisted of wearing the *semadi*, walking towards the fire with the Anastenarides, holding the candle next to them, walking in the final circle with them and then entering the *konaki* again. It allowed me to still be able to watch. This time, I literally watched more closely, while I was also being watched by the witnesses.

Christos told me: “It is different to participate.” It was different to participate. First of all, a gesture from the Anastenarides towards me created both the participation and the difference. A gesture upon which they had agreed, not using many words. Maria Louisa suggested it and then Mina articulated it. It was a gesture of inclusion and therefore acceptance, and a suggestion of some sort of unison. “Let

us do this together.” Or “Help us do this.” There were some offices I was asked to perform. These were not only offices during the breaks, as it had happened in 2010 and in part in 2011, such as washing the dishes or walking on the earth, but offices during one of the practices. I was not given many instructions. I was advised to mirror the Anastenaris in front of me. Through mirroring him I became part of the donation of the gift taking place in the community. The donation of the gift was at least reflected on me, as I was standing between the witnesses and the Anastenarides, holding a candle that illuminated not what they did really, for what they did was illuminated by the other, the bigger fire. What I was holding, this mirror of the big fire, was only illuminating my face. The witnesses could see my face and the red semadi on my shoulders. This is how I became part of the reactivation of the community.

This last trip in May 2011 made me part of another community too. A community of three witnesses. We three invented some witnessing offices: the dress code, the instructions that I gave my friends, and then our routine of breakfast – *konaki* – thermal spring – *konaki* – whiskey constituted a structure consisting of practices and breaks through which our team was able to function. We were assigned some peripheral offices by the Anastenarides such as walking on the earth. There were also borders at stake, not only between the participants and us but also between each other. There was Maria-Lisa and me claiming the same space, being affected by the same practice at the same time. Expressing this in different ways and being encouraged by different participants to participate.

Mina for example has never asked me if I have been affected. She did ask Maria-Lisa. At the same time, Maria Louisa was insisting on my walking on fire and

in the end she managed to persuade Mina to accept me as part of the group. Josh was not affected in the same way. He did not feel the need to join the Anastenarides. He became in that sense a witness of two other engaged witnesses who wanted the same thing: to lift the string that divided them from the participants. Both of us claimed the same space. There were moments I felt that Maria-Lisa was invading the space I was trying to claim. There were moments when at least Maria-Lisa must have felt restricted by my instructions, my attempts to keep her from claiming the space in a way that would threaten my own simultaneous attempt to claim it.

At the same time, the *munus* that the community of the Anastenarides shares “isn’t having, but on the contrary it is a debt, a pledge, a gift that is to be given and that therefore will establish a lack.” In the case of our small community of witnesses, Maria-Lisa and I witnessed the “gift” the Anastenarides were giving and we were affected by it. We both wanted to take part in it. After experiencing the “gift,” Maria-Lisa lacked the words to speak – as I did too in 2009 and 2010. And after experiencing it for the first time from a different position, after having worn the *semadi*, I felt bereft when what had been given to me was suddenly and with no warning taken away. And all three of us experienced the “release” Josh spoke of, during the final dance that followed firewalking.

I also had not made the connection Josh spoke about. I had not noticed the structure ‘practice – break – practice – break’ and how the break can be experienced as complementary to the practice, as well as the ways in which it facilitates it, for both the participants and the witnesses.

I had not noticed it until he did. The criticism of Artaud and other avant garde exponents that the crisis in the various theatrical forms that we could call realistic

derives, among other factors, from the total absence of dialogue with theatre's ritualistic origins, acquires a new dimension. The elements or levels that merge in Josh's observations form two couples. The first is individual/collective. The second is ritualistic/mundane. I feel that both those couples have much to do with theatre, at least as it has been discussed in Chapters One and Three: very schematically speaking, when the avant garde theatrical experiments of the past and the present centuries which are in dialogue with ritual seem to neglect this basic idea, necessity and practice of passage to a non-ritual state, they risk trying to formalistically "turn theatre into ritual" in vain. If witnessing and taking part in the ritualistic practices is perceived as not involving this state, any theatrical dialogue with ritual risks to end up merely externally copying ritualistic forms. Constantly passing from one level, rhythm etc. to another, from ritual to non-ritual, from performance to pause, from solemn to everyday aspects, from serious to comic, seems to be part something necessary for performance in order to remain "live."

Chapter Seven-Conclusions

TOWARDS THE EXAMINATION OF THE SURVIVAL OF THE ANASTENARIA RITUAL PERFORMANCE: FROM THE FIERY ACTOR TO THE CO-PERFORMER WITNESS

Survival and the Anastenaria

After the Anastenarides in Langadas have walked on fire, they gather and eat together inside the *konaki*. There, they make a wish: ‘to next year.’ Even if the number of the witnesses has decreased when compared to the previous decades, even if some of their practices change from one year to the next, this ritual continues being performed. It still affects thinkers who are interested in ritual performance, such as Jane Sansom and Dimitris Xygalatas. It still affects thinkers and practitioners who are interested in theatrical performance, such as Anna Misopolinou, Sotiris Hatzakis and Diagoras Hronopoulos.

What is it that drives the Anastenaria forward? After having observed the Anastenaria in the field and engaged with the participants for three years, after having conducted my research for five years, I was able to suggest that there are elements which relate to this ritual’s continuation and to the visitors’ ongoing interest in it.

On the one hand I noticed the ecstatic dimension of the Anastenaria: a dialogue between consciousness, inspiration and technique. What the participants call “it.” “It” is something without which one cannot walk on fire. As Babis Papadopoulos told me in 2009: “When you want to enter, you enter. If you want to do something, anything and you believe in it, you will do it. If you don’t want and if it does not want you, you will not do it.” The same need for an element that goes beyond technique, even if it requires it, for a ‘fiery’ element that opposes mechanical repetition when performing for the stage, has been and still is expressed by theatre theorists and practitioners such as Antonin Artaud, Eugenio Barba and John Strasberg.

On the other hand there was the relationship between witnessing and participation. The participants initiated and enacted the ritualistic practices. The witnesses gathered around them. The witnesses were considered by them as their community's potential new members. They enjoyed the witnesses' attention and interest – especially when they thought of them as 'respectful.' The participants would then provide their witnesses with hospitality, care and trust. On the contrary, the witnesses would sometimes obstruct the enactment of the ritualistic practices. Some of them were indifferent, some others loud or hostile. In that case the participants would feel the need to protect themselves. Finally, some witnesses said they were affected by the ritual performance and some said they maintained their critical distance. In order to challenge such dichotomy between theory and practice and to find a tool with the help of which the complex relationship between participation and witnessing could be examined, I deployed the ethnographic model of the co-performer witness.

The survival of the Anastenaria ritual performance, far from being a given, had to be grounded on this double axis. The ecstatic dimension of the ritual performance. And the path from witnessing to participation, this space in between.

Review of an Itinerary

The question that the present thesis engaged with was under what circumstances and through which lenses the Anastenaria can be considered as a surviving ritual performance. This question was examined through: 1) theatrical reflection and practice, in dialogue with an investigation of the ecstatic dimension of the Anastenaria – Part A – and 2) the investigation of changing ritualistic practices in

their relation to the forgotten and the dynamic method of a co-performer witness – Part B.

In Chapter One three points of controversy within the Anastenaria scholarship were detected. It was through them that the three starting points of my argument were triggered: 1) the relationship between the Anastenaria and performance aspects for the stage, 2) the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria and 3) the Anastenaria as a ritual performance of return.

The first point of controversy in the study of the Anastenaria was traced in the association of firewalking with the participants' belief of Saints and supernatural power. One has to choose the appropriate rhetorics in order to articulate such an association. These have ranged from the rhetorics drawing from Greek Orthodox and/or ancient Greek religion and art and sometimes a synthesis of the two to psychological anthropology and neuroscience ¹.

I maintained that the new researchers, by picking a rhetoric among the existing ones, risk finding themselves already within a unilateral position in the discourse on firewalking and supernatural powers. One's own argument may not necessarily be in accord with such a position. At the same time, as is the case with the present work, the argument may wholly or partially stem from the dialogue with it.

The relations between the Anastenaria ritual performance and theatrical performance were considered as synchronic – perceived as rapidly changing. It was suggested that if the two were to be viewed as belonging to a continuum, this would not make the tensions between them disappear. My attempt was not to offer one more argument in support of ancient ties between the two. It was rather an effort to look

back for the sake of the present. As one of the main aims of this research was to underline precise ways in which the Anastenaria relates to the forgotten, the eliminated, the remote past became part of such a dialogue too.

Katerina Kakouri viewed the Anastenaria and Kalogeros rituals as part of the same cycle and their study as an essential contribution not only to anthropology but also to the prehistory of theatre: according to her, theatre could therefore draw from what was already its heritage. My criticism on Kakouri's argument was that rituals as well as the communities that perform them do not remain unaltered. I then moved to a critical survey of anthropological positions that related ritual to theatre and had an important impact upon artists of the theatrical avant-gardes which considered the return to ritual as a means to purify and reinvigorate theatrical performance.

This was followed by a definition of the term "theatre." What theatre stands for in this research required turning and returning "insistently to the crossroads" where theatre as theory and practice exists ³. Some specific aspects of the relationship between the Anastenaria in particular – as part of a vaster range of similar phenomena – and theatrical performance were examined.

At first sight theatrical performance seems to be less threatened by change than the small communities of the Anastenarides. However, from the beginning of the twentieth century, several theatre makers have expressed their need to reinvigorate theatrical thought and practice and the present global crisis makes such feelings more acute ².

The actor, the director, the playwright, the scholar often feel the need, perhaps even more than in the past, to discover a source of inspiration and force that will

empower them to remain “on stage,” to stay part of the theatrical performance (whether linked with ritual or not) and at the same time to communicate with what they feel as “beyond themselves.” The space in which they have to evolve is a dangerous one. It includes threats of destructive and purifying fire that has to be experienced and controlled.

The second point of controversy that was handled in Chapter One concerned first-hand and secondhand information in relation to witnessing and the element of change. The outcome of the critical examination of this second point was that methodological tools such as first-hand and secondhand information, when deployed in investigating the Anastenaria, have been affected by ideologies. I maintained that there is a need to define/describe the Anastenaria keeping in mind its dynamic – and therefore not easily incorporable in ideological schemes – character: some elements of it change rapidly, practices being added, others eliminated, from one year to the next.

What might some central choices made in this thesis, such as exploring the ‘ecstatic’ dimension of the Anastenaria, prioritising first-hand information, considering witnessing as a co-performance and choosing to return to the same place, Langadas, for three years, have to tell the reader as part of a dialogue between method and argument?

In order to address the above question this thesis followed traces of performance studies scholars such as Richard Schechner, who has emphasised the interdisciplinary quality of these studies as providing helpful tools for looking and Dwight Conquergood who has provided ways by which to understand performance encouraging us to think of it as “an optic and operator of research” 3. Conquergood, considered the bodily presence of the ethnographer as a necessary component of “an

ethnography of the ears and the heart that reimagines participant observation as co-performative witnessing” 4.

The first trait of co-performative witnessing in the Anastenaria is its dynamic character. In my following the particular strand of performance studies that focuses on ritual performance, I suggest a new way of engaging with the Anastenaria, by providing a flexible methodological tool for its understanding each time, a tool that can facilitate reflecting on it as it is changing.

The second aspect of co-performative witnessing was reflected through gradual participation of the author in the Anastenaria. The narration of this journey formed part of Chapter Four, continued as part of Chapter Five and found an end – and a new beginning – as part of Chapter Six.

The third aspect consists in understanding witnessing as a co-performance of return. The term “return” has been used in the following ways that range from the personal to the collective. Firstly, it means my personal return to the same *konaki* in Langadas every May over three consecutive years, following the sequence of practices from one day to the next as well as within the same day as a way of tracing the surviving as well as the eliminated forms of the Anastenaria. First-hand information had to be prioritised: there was something different at work when change was happening in close proximity to the author, affecting and, to a degree, being affected by the witness as part of a co-performance.

Secondly, becoming part of a chain of witnesses who have observed a chain of practices, helped shed some light upon a research that in more than one way consisted

of following traces of predecessors – family members, teachers, friends and the numerous scholars who have written on the Anastenaria.

Thirdly, the Anastenaria takes place every year on the same dates and following a basic pattern of practices, involving repetitions, in that sense returns from one year to the next, but also from one day to the next as well as within the same day and within the same practice. Visiting Langadas more than once and interviewing the same people over the period of three years, enabled me not only to respond “in the moment” with the Anastenarides and their practices, but also to constantly challenge my own observations on a phenomenon that is both repetitive and changing.

The term co-performance of return is used because the Anastenaria consists in a ritual performance of returns, repetition and recurrence. It is through such elements that survival of the participant, of the community and of the ritual performance itself can be detected.

The third point of controversy in the study of the Anastenaria concerns another central discourse: the “search for continuities in Greek culture.” The position sustained here was that instead of one continuity one must look for various strategies regarding this concept and for precise elements which eventually constitute returns of the past – meaning the elements that persist, that return and form part of the surviving forms of the Anastenaria. A particular attention was given to those elements’ potential to persist in the ways the participants enact their practices, the ways the witnesses observe them, the ways they might be “reactivated” in such a ritual performance. Such elements were specific to the ritual performance as it was observed in Langadas.

If some sort of pattern does persist, if some sort of pattern does return, what could such pattern involve and how could it be defined? Its first trait forms part of certain elements concerning “the past” of the Anastenaria, and in particular the history as well as what might be called a popular myth/historical narrative regarding Kosti, the place of origin of the ritual. The narrative concerning the destruction of Kosti can be associated with persecution and trauma, as well as survival and liberation. This association constitutes one of the main abandoned, forgotten or repressed elements of the surviving forms of the Anastenaria.

Secondly, the Anastenaria might eventually, as several other ritual performances in Greece and the Balkans, be considered as a more recent re-elaboration of ancient religion and rituals, Dionysiac or others, which has transformed and Christianised pagan motifs. Such partial transformation and Christianisation of pagan motifs can be traced in the coexistence in the ritual of the infanticidal mother of the Anastenaria song of Mikrokonstantinos with the figure of the mother as found in Orthodox texts, such as St. Helen, the Christian mother of St. Constantine and co-protector saint of the Anastenaria.

As it has been claimed in the past by scholars such as Kakouri and as the author was able to verify, the Anastenaria seem to make part of a broader ritual and cultural pattern, which has a pre- (or para-) theatrical dimension. In fact, it might have been part of a larger pattern also including the Kalogeros seasonal ritual dromenon – folk play – centered around death and resurrection.

. Elements such as the song sung as part of the Anastenaria seem to link the revival of nature implicit in the seasonal ritual with the resurrection of the hero and the salvation of the community from persecution and political oppression, which is

more than implicit in the narratives relating to the forced immigration of the Anastenarides from Kosti.

Thirdly, it was maintained that in order to trace how the forgotten and the repressed can help elucidate the present, considered as dynamic and rapidly changing, we could make one more link. The one between Saint Constantine, Constantine the Great, the first Byzantine Emperor, and Constantine Paleologos, the last Byzantine Emperor killed while he was defending Constantinople.

Subsequently, the returning pattern of the Anastenaria could be interpreted as an expression of the persistent theme of eternal return as discussed by Mircea Eliade: returning to an “origin” links the present object, the present practice, the present performance, with objects, practices and performances past 5. Such returns entail the awakening or reconstruction of memory. Its vehicles include myth and narration. In the case of the Anastenaria we are dealing with more than one myth. The first myth/historical narrative relates to Kosti, the lost homeland. An earlier myth links the Anastenaria either with the Dionysiac rituals, or with rituals taking place during the first centuries of Christianity. Both these myths are present in the ways the participants perform their practices and the witnesses observe them. The returning pattern of the Anastenaria then relates to what is being remembered, reenacted, to what is being performed: to what survives.

There are at least two more elements from “the past,” that is considered as both history and popular myth, that persist. Firstly, the element of persecution in its many forms, from the Turks, from the Church, from the neighbours, from the members of the same family, in a sense from dangerous forces operating within one’s own body too. Persecution is followed by survival and liberation. This involves

remembrance and resistance to such remembrance, repression and return in the ritual performance of the Anastenaria.

Secondly, the choice to adopt the term “ritual performance” in order to define the Anastenaria was based on certain observations. While some parts of the Anastenaria are still present, some others are today significantly altered or forgotten. Some of the forgotten aspects could be important, not only while attempting to shed light to the enigmatic past of the ritual but also because they may be precious for performance theory concerning what survives in Langadas today.

I visited and studied the Anastenaria ritual performance because I believed that my effort, as well as the effort of other scientists or artists and past or future co-performer witnesses, is not in vain. Every newcomer arrives in order to ask new questions as part of a reality that, despite what one may momentarily feel, does not remain unaltered.

After Chapter One the text proceeds to Part One that includes Chapters Two and Three. Part One was entitled: The Anastenaria Ritual Performance and Performing for the Stage: Technique, Inspiration, Consciousness. Chapter Two was entitled: The Anastenaria Practices in Langadas: Thinking towards a Definition of Technique in Relation to the Ritual Performance.

Chapter Two was based on observations made in Langadas, Greece, in May 2009. The reader was introduced for the first time to the location, the participants and the Anastenaria practices. The underlying dimension of this description has been defined by scholars such as Anastasios Hourmouziadis and Katerina Kakouri as ecstatic ⁶. I borrowed the term ‘ecstatic’ in order to address such dimension, the

primary reason for this choice being that ‘ecstasy’ forms part of the discourse on the Anastenaria and the worship of Dionysus, god of theatre 7.

The question concerning the ecstatic dimension of the Anastenaria forms a basic aspect of the present thesis, in agreeing with George Vizyenos, Anastasios Hourmouziadis, Kakouri and the others who claimed that the contemporary ritual shares this ecstatic dimension with the ancient ritual, theatre’s predecessor 8. Vizyenos had maintained as early as the end of the nineteenth century that the Kalogeros, a “dromenon” of the “Dionysiac cycle,” constituted a revival of the ancient Greek ritual of Licnitis, which celebrated the birth of Dionysus 9.

Kakouri viewed the Anastenaria and Kalogeros as part of the same cycle and as an essential contribution to the prehistory of theatre: theatre could therefore draw from what was already its heritage. Kakouri’s basic argument on the Anastenaria/Kalogeros relationship served as an entry point towards the Anastenaria ritual performance/performing for the stage relationship. My own testimony also confirmed that the Anastenaria forms part of a larger seasonal pattern including the Kalogeros, which presents precise elements that could be characterized as pre-theatric.

However, my exploration of the term ‘ecstasy’ in relation to the Anastenaria in Chapter Two did not draw upon an investigation of ancient traces. The term ‘ecstasy’ was approached on the basis of specific observations; specific in the sense that they were made in the field and they had to do with the body of the participant and her/his actions in the frame of a more or less precise sequence of ritualistic practices. Through the observation of such body actions and ritualistic practices I defined what can be termed a specific technique that leads to an ecstatic state.

In this approach I followed the steps of scholars who have explored the interplay between consciousness and religious experience, such as Erika Bourguignon, who has stated that out of 483 human societies 430 (90%) utilise at least one technique for inducing altered states of consciousness ¹⁰. M. Henneberg and A. Saniotis developed Bourguignon's theory in stating that spiritual or religious states are fundamental to the human brain ¹¹. Furthermore, in their article "Explorations into the Biology of Emotion and Religious Experience" they tried to "reaffirm the significance of ecstatic states and their phenomenological manifestations; how they are triggered via body practices" ¹².

It was with the help of specific observations in the sense that was described above that a discussion of the existing links between the Anastenaria ritual performance and performing for the stage was initiated in Chapter Two, through the description of the Anastenaria in relation to an ecstatic state. In Chapter Three this discussion would extend to performing for the stage.

I clarified that by "links between the Anastenaria and performing for the stage" I meant four categories. The first category had to do with the discourse on the Anastenaria and the Dionysiac rituals. Examples of this discourse can be found in the work by scholars such as Kakouri, Takis Akritas, Konstantinos Kourtidis, Georgios Kousiadis, Katerina Mouratidou, and Kostas Romeos ¹³.

The second category had to do with theatre practitioners' interest in the ritual and their use of it in theatrical productions – especially Greek theatre practitioners, such as Theodoros Terzopoulos from Theatre Attis, Sotiris Hatzakis, Artistic Director of the National Theatre, Diagoras Hronopoulos, Artistic Director of the Art Theatre

Karolos Koun, Dimos Avdeliodis and others, but also international, such as Jerzy Grotowski.

Two more categories having to do with such links between the Anastenaria and performing for the stage included: the dramatic themes and texts of the songs that are used as part of the ritual performance, as well as the specific technique that the Anastenarides use, which is akin to the technique of a performer who works for the stage, in ways that were discussed in Chapter Three. The two latter categories derive from and overlap with the two main categories.

The discussion of an ecstatic state in relation to the Anastenaria that stemmed from my description of the ritual performance was enriching, not so much through the imitation of a set of forms or the revelation of some ‘secret’ practices, but rather through offering a better understanding of the relation between inspiration, consciousness and a specific technique.

The ecstatic state that the Anastenarides experience relates to a specific technique that can be traced through and forms part of the ritualistic practices that were described in Chapter Two. Even if such element of the ritual performance, that was related to paganism from as early as the end of the nineteenth century, and that results in the free movement of both the male and the female body, has contributed to the marginalization of the ritual and the hostility of the official Greek Orthodox Church, it is through that that survival (of the participant, of the community, of the ritual performance itself) is sought.

Chapter Three was entitled: The Anastenaria Practices in Relation to Aspects of Performing for the Stage. Chapter Three started with the reference to an

observation made during my field research in May 2009 in Langadas. This was followed by the discussion of a notorious incident that has occurred during a theatrical performance. This then led to examining further several questions on performance and what could be considered as presenting certain analogies with the ritual ecstatic state through the deployment of the ‘fiery actor’ metaphor.

Kakouri insisted upon the Dionysiac origin of the Anastenaria, drawing a link between her contemporary ritualistic performance – the Anastenaria – and an ancient ritualistic performance – the Dionysiac rituals – which led to the creation of an artistic performance – tragedy ¹⁴. Furthermore, she argued that the Anastenaria was part of a larger seasonal pattern, including the Kalogeros ritual. According to Kakouri, Kalogeros consists in a “dromenon,” a theatrical ritual of the “Dionysiac cycle” ¹⁵.

George Vizyenos had sustained as early as the end of the nineteenth century that the Kalogeros constituted a revival of the ancient Thracian and Greek ritual of Licnitis, which celebrated the miraculous and tormented birth of Dionysus, god of theatre ¹⁶. Kakouri viewed the Anastenaria and Kalogeros, which presents precise elements that could be characterized as pre-theatric, as part of the same cycle and as an essential contribution to the prehistory of theatre: theatre could therefore draw from what was already its heritage ¹⁷.

My own testimony also has confirmed that the Anastenaria forms part of a larger seasonal pattern including the Kalogeros, that still takes place in Northern Greece. The Anastenaris Babis Papadopoulos talked to me about his visit in Mavrolefki, another Greek town. While people were celebrating the Kalogeros outside, singing loud, happy songs, the Anastenarides were meeting inside, and there, behind closed doors, in secret, they were singing their dark songs. In a way this

eventually implies that the two rituals are not deployed as equivalent events in a sequence of time. They rather obey to a different structural organisation including the “inner” and the “outer.”

Two performances taking place at the same place at the same time. One of them behind closed doors. A theatrical ritual, a “dromenon,” becomes the mask under which a ritual performance, darker and certainly reserved to the initiates, occurs. One might remember the enigmatic relation uniting and separating in ancient Greece the Eleusinian mysteries, covered with mystery and reserved to the initiates and the theatre of Dionysus in the city of Athens – yet this cannot serve as a universal paradigm. The relationship between the Anastenaria ritual performance and performing for the stage is a territory made of masks, shadows, mirrors and reflections, a territory that resists verification.

Anthropological positions relating ritual to theatre have had an important impact upon artists of the theatrical avant-gardes that considered the reference to ritual as a means to reinvigorate theatrical performance ¹⁸. For someone like Antonin Artaud such reinvigoration should involve the end of masterpieces, actors and the stage ¹⁹. The influence of Artaud upon directors such as Julian Beck, Grotowski and Barba may have played a role in the use of the Anastenaria as a source of inspiration for theatrical performances in Greece ²⁰.

The ‘fiery actor’ is a metaphor coined by the author and inspired by the firewalker at the Anastenaria. The fiery actor’s traits are: her/his relation to an ecstatic state; the dialogue between such state and technique; her/his total presence on a specific level and the element of fear; the dream or the fantasy of another theatre, a double of the theatre; her/his relation to the character/person question and to a

transitory period of time; disobedience to external rules for the sake of an internal discipline; and surpassing emotional/physical pain.

The 'fiery actor' metaphor is a tool to investigate this field created by the tensions not only between ritualistic and theatrical performance but also between the various contrasting visions of theatre, visions that are often present in the same person. More questions, some of them implicit, were present during this discussion. These stemmed from: various theoretical and creative references to the relations ritual/theatre, the relations between theory and practice in theatrical and other performances, the role of altered – or perhaps extended – consciousness in such activities, the relations between on the one hand irrational elements and inspiration and on the other consciousness and technique, as well as the various aspects and levels of notions such as returns and borders.

Entering into such a state – becoming what I called a fiery actor – is not something that can easily fit into a set of a theatrical performance's rules. Because entering a controlled ecstatic state with the help of technique and overcoming fear is something artists, writers, thinkers, people of one or another faith may also be attempting to do, and yet out of this experience we know this is something that we have to struggle for. The fiery actor's performance is not a given; it cannot be taken for granted; it cannot be demanded for it cannot be guaranteed. This quest for a desired – not granted – result is present in both performances, ritual and theatrical, and technique is only one of the factors that can determine success while others, connected to what we call the non-rational element seem to escape, at least partly, full understanding, definition and mastery. Yet returning to the Anastenaria ritual

performance over the period of three years, as examined in Part Two, would prove useful for both its understanding and its practical use.

Part Two, entitled: Witnessing the Anastenaria: Co-Performance and Returns, consisted of Chapters Four, Five and Six. In Part Two, the question of the Anastenaria as a surviving ritual performance was examined through an investigation of the changing ritualistic practices in their relation to the forgotten and the dynamic method of a co-performer witness of the Anastenaria. Chapters Four, Five and Six are dealing with the precise ways in which the Anastenaria has changed and continues to change with time. The understanding of what is forgotten became part of the understanding of what still survives/remains.

Chapter Four was entitled: The Anastenaria through Co-Performative Witnessing in May 2009: Memory, Community and Eliminated Practices. In this Chapter I used my field research in Langadas in May 2009. The theoretical framework deployed here would be used again in Chapters Five and Six – where it was further developed. It is described below.

I began by defining my position as a researcher, talking about an urge to pass from the state of witness to that of participant. This led to a discussion on participant observation, focusing on the work of anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead and ethnographically informed performance studies scholars such as Richard Schechner. I then asked whether it would be possible for the witness of Langadas to consciously apply Michael Taussig's suggestion of "the double action of being part of something yet distant from it, too, of being immersed in an experiential reality and being outside the experience" ²¹. This question led to a discussion of

Walter Benjamin's thinking on the role of memory in witnessing – and in particular how it relates to a “rigorous connection between foreground and distance” 22.

I then described my methodology that consisted of the following elements. 1. Remembering and reimagining such “rigorous connection between foreground and distance” as experienced during my first visit to the village of Langadas in 2009 in order to describe this visit in Narrative One. 2. Being aware of the fact that my way of witnessing the same place and the same practices would change over these three years (2009-2011 3. I offered a working definition of the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria in 2009. 4. This led to the question: “In what way may violence relate to what is at stake at the Anastenaria?” This subject was discussed via Roberto Esposito's work on the concept of community that helped form a definition of the Anastenaria community 23. For this definition I used the examples of two Anastenaria practices: firewalking and animal sacrifice. 5. The reader was then introduced to Isabelle Stengers' and Alan Read's work on eliminated practices, which provided a framework in order to address the element of change in relation to the Anastenaria: a ritual performance including some practices that have endured and others that can be considered as eliminated 24.

Narrative One on the Anastenaria in Langadas in May 2009 was based on the same material as the description of the Anastenaria in Chapter Two. However, while that chapter focused on the ecstatic dimension of the Anastenaria, this narrative consisted in a more extended description that traced the question of the Anastenaria as a surviving ritual performance. I deployed the definition of the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria via Conquergood and Benjamin, the definition of an Anastenaria community via Esposito, and Stengers' and Read's work on eliminated practices.

The Narrative examined the following elements. 1) Eliminated practices in the Anastenaria such as the familial clash in Langadas, the condition of the konaki, the forgetting of the lyrics of the Mikrokonstantinos song, the absence of the musicians, the fact that the witnesses were fewer when compared to past decades, and the uncertainty of whether the Anastenarides would walk on fire seen as potential elimination. A form of repression might relate to the recurring theme of familial clashes and this forgetting or repression could be a sign of the survival of practices because of their elimination. I concluded that the participants' interest in the ritual was not eliminated. 2) The discussion of a "rigorous connection between foreground and distance" in relation to the witness. There was a gradual shift of this relationship that also involved steps forward and back. I observed that not all elements of the Anastenaria ritual performance were open to the witnesses and that therefore there might still be certain things that resist close observation, things left unsaid or not explained yet. The division, the line between participants and witnesses, was made clearer during the practice of firewalking. I argued that it is a fine line, as the witnesses are potential new participants. 3) The discussion of the Anastenaria community which performs an animal sacrifice: I maintained that the animal transports, in its involuntary exit beyond the borders, the faults, or the violence of an entire community.

The survival question was now present from another point of view. As one of the participants said, the Anastenarides "have not mixed tradition with changes." However, they are "adjusting to the era." Even if they do not intend to change their practices, their practices change. Furthermore, the witness can play a key role in the "reactivation of previously excluded practices," by affecting the balance between "tradition" and "change." I concluded that in the practice of firewalking we can trace

the reactivation of their community, which occurs mainly after the Anastenarides walk on fire. This practice uses, embraces both the threat and the loss and in that sense it incorporates them. I maintained that the engaged witnesses as well as the participants both receive the community's gift, even if the witnesses do not initiate it. I asked the following question that would be answered as part of the next Chapter: are those who are being affected by the ritual taking part in the reactivation of the community too?

Chapter Five is entitled: The Anastenaria through Co-Performative Witnessing in May 2010: The Role of the Witness in relation to the Community. In Chapter Five I developed the theoretical framework that was introduced in Chapter Four. I mentioned the differences between the way I witnessed the ritual performance in May 2009 and May 2010. The "earliest picture" that Walter Benjamin had spoken about in his aphorism "Lost-and-found office" could not be "restored" as I focused more on the foreground, on details of the Anastenaria practices 25.

The focus on these details, my inability to see the big picture viewed before, interrupted by short-lived returns, enabled more intimate investigations. During this second visit I acquired an insider/outsider quality, attempting a different approach to the field: free from a need/obsession with results, I took care of this research's results more.

I then argued that the presence and therefore the role of the witness of the Anastenaria cannot be considered as a given, as this ritual performance does not depend on the witnesses in order to take place. According to the participant Maria Louisa Papadopoulou, who is also an experienced theatre director and actress, this is a major difference to theatre.

The ethnographer's Konstantinos Romaios and psychiatrist's Anghelos Tanagras contribution to the ritual performance in the fifties has been decisive: they encouraged the Anastenarides to perform in front of witnesses. Even if being witnessed seems to play a secondary role, the witnesses are the potential new members and therefore important for the survival of the Anastenaria.

The model of the co-performer witness of the Anastenaria was developed in 2010: I had a conversation with the Anastenarides, not only talking about them, but also talking to and with them. In other words, my methodology shifted more towards what Dwight Conquergood has called “dialogical performance”: the methodology in 2010 shifted towards the witnessing of the self and the other (the Anastenarides, the participants) “together” while they were being “held apart” ²⁶. The dialogical stance when witnessing the Anastenaria ritual consisted in an attempt to maintain the above balance. These changes were reflected in the way Narrative Two was written.

As a co-performer witness, I played a part. The means for me in order to do so was to return to practices I had associated with productions in which I took part as an actress and a director, namely: listening; concentration; openness/availability; improvisation; a partly scripted-partly improvised dialogue. This quality of my witnessing the Anastenaria consisted in the perception of this witnessing as a part among other parts and other *dramatis personae*, in that sense too as co-performative and the deliberate that lies in this co-performance.

In this Chapter the central question of the Anastenaria as a surviving ritual performance was approached through a focus on the role of the witness, considered here as a potential new member of the community, who may therefore help its continuation.

The starting point of Narrative Two on the Anastenaria in Langadas in May 2010 was how the enactment of a peripheral practice with the participant Maria Louisa Papadopoulou led to her initiating a dialogue and, among other matters, she suggested that I walk on fire. How some of the other participants started approaching me too was described. On the contrary, the attempt to initiate a dialogue with Mina Machairopoulou, another participant, did not produce immediate results. When this dialogue occurred, Mina maintained that the Anastenaria should not be investigated but felt, and that there is no link between this ritual and theatre, in that the Anastenaria is much stronger and cannot be explained rationally.

Furthermore, I found out that the grandfather is believed to communicate with the ghosts of other, dead grandfathers. I experienced some of the things that can happen to the Anastenarides physically before they walk on fire. The participants Maria Louisa and Pantelis Christopoulos told me that the grandfather must be thinking of me as a future participant.

I also found out a link between the Anastenaria and the Kalogeros ritual performance that corroborated Katerina Kakouri's argument that was discussed in Chapters One and Three. The resurrection theme included in the Kalogeros was now connected with the Anastenarides: the etymology Anastenaria/resurrection sustained by one of the participants in Chapter Four acquired a further corroboration.

This Narrative's conclusions were the following. 1) In 2010 I avoided asking the participants too many questions that would reveal an eagerness to find out their "secrets." As a result, I received some valuable information that I might have not been able to access if they had sensed that I was interested in their "secrets." My methodology might have been one of a pretender, pretending that I was not interested

in their secrets, only in order to find (some of) them out and then reveal them in this text. 2) Three participants gave some signs/clues that one day I might become a participant too. 3) Even if I felt attracted by the fire as if it was a magnet, I resisted the impulse to walk on it. However, I became part of the community, not only through the peripheral and visible “offices” assigned to me, but also because of the way that I was affected. 4) It was also argued that it is the participants who do not only embody/enact the ritualistic practices fully but also initiate them and that they are therefore vital parts of the community that can exist without the witnesses. 5) Reference was made to a kind of romantic approach shared by some artists, intellectuals and theatre practitioners who approach what they see as popular or traditional culture as a means to return to the origins that will purify and invigorate their thought and craft. 6) Finally, it has been explained that in the following Chapter I would examine the ways in which my own return and participation in May 2011, for the first time together with a community of witnesses, sheds new light upon the central question of this thesis.

Chapter Six was entitled: The Anastenaria through Co-Performative Witnessing in May 2011: Participation, Survival and A Community of Witnesses. Co-performative witnessing in 2011 would get one more step closer to the wished-for “double action” of experiencing while at the same time reflecting on the experience, an idea that forms part of the theoretical framework that was used in Chapters Four, Five and Six 27.

Chapter Six is a reflection of Chapter Three that examined the relationship between the Anastenaria and aspects of performing for the stage. The discussion continues in the following ways.

1) First of all, the texts and the themes of the ritual performance are in dialogue with dramatic texts and themes of Classic tragedy/comedy as well as with dramatic texts of the twentieth and twenty first century Western theatre. A focus on such texts serves here as an argument that supports the survival of the ritual performance.

2) Secondly, In May 2011 I became a participant. The details of this participation form part of Narrative Three. There, I am getting closer to the ritualistic practices, getting “in their midst” in a quite literal way, by taking part in some of them
40: through the story of an affected witness who became a participant, therefore serving the continuation of the Anastenaria community, I continue examining the question of survival of the ritual performance.

3) Thirdly, this co-performer witness is also a theatre-maker used to analysing movement and text in ways which include paying attention to detail, actions, conventions, habits and *dramatis personae*. The two more witnesses who entered the dialogue in 2011, Maria-Lisa Geyer and Josh Hoglund, are theatre directors too: this influenced the ways in which they observed and spoke of the Anastenaria in this Chapter.

Narrative Three had the form of a dialogue. It incorporated my own observations but also the observations of my two companions, Josh Hoglund and Maria-Lisa Geyer, two first-time witnesses. Dialogical performance in the Anastenaria therefore included these voices too and their stories became the ones of mediated witnessing. These two witnesses became the other two main *dramatis personae* of the Narrative, in the sense that they expressed themselves with their “own” voices. However, those were not voices recorded with the help of a tape

recorder or edited by them, but rather the fruit of my effort to render the main elements of what they said and what they let me know that they felt and thought.

Furthermore, this experiment's aim was to render a certain kind of split of the co-performer witness, now becoming a kind of a group in dialogue: a community of co-performers/witnesses. What this choice facilitated, among other things, was to allow the focus of my "character" to be the narration of my own participation. The two other "characters'" focus was: the description of a first-time witnessing of the Anastenaria practices (Maria-Lisa Geyer) and a brief albeit essential analysis of these practices (Josh Hoglund). These three voices were interrupted by penetrating comments by the participant Maria-Louisa Papadopoulou and a discussion with the participant Pantelis Christopoulos.

Narrative Three included but was not limited to the following elements. Even if I thought that the procession to get the sacrificial animal happened every year, the animal was already at the *konaki*. The sacrifice of the bull was forbidden by the authorities on the grounds that it is contrary to hygiene rules. This is why, today, the bull is being slaughtered in the slaughterhouse of Langadas. The participants listened to the Mikrokonstantinos song through an old radio cassette player. They sang on top of the music. They forgot some of the lyrics.

Maria-Lisa Geyer narrated to me the discussion she had with Pantelis Christopoulos on his participation. Kostas Gaitatzis asked us to walk on the earth on which they would light the fire. Maria-Lisa narrated how she was affected during the preparatory dance. She described the technique that relates to the dance on the carpet, noting that the dancers are principals to the scene while the musicians have a supporting role. She maintained that it must be no coincidence that a lot of folk music

makes great use of chromatics and jarring harmonies, which can be sensual, stirring, penetrating, disturbing, transporting one to a different state of consciousness.

The participant Maria Louisa Papadopoulou asked the other participants for the lyrics of the Mikrokonstantinos song. She said that the Anastenaria has something to do with cleansing the spirit and allowing a person to face their inner torments/sadness. She encouraged me to walk on fire. Maria Louisa Papadopoulou corroborated my definition of a technique in relation to the Anastenaria that formed part of Chapter Two.

I narrated my participation that was marked by the *semadi* that was placed around my shoulders and ended when it was removed. In the end, the chief Anastenaris' son told me: "It is different to participate."

Josh Hoglund maintained, corroborating my definition of a technique in relation to the Anastenaria that formed part of Chapter Two, that the breaks between the practices gave the Anastenarides space to let the mystical resonate with them as individuals. He described how he received the most concrete display of power and belief after the firewalking in the final dance back in the *konaki*. To him this final dance was an acknowledgement of a shared experience that was both common and deeply personal. He maintained that this juxtaposition is the motor that drives the Anastenaria forward.

In my Commentary on Narrative Three I described the new developments regarding the key elements that formed part of the theoretical framework of Part Two: Chapters Four, Five and Six. Foreground and distance. When returning to Langadas for the third time, I was familiar with all the participants and with the sequence and

the content of the practices. At the same time, I was surprised by new things that occurred and by eliminated practices such as the procession that did not take place. Maria-Lisa Geyer was a newcomer and her description of a first-time witnessing was in dialogue with my own third-time witnessing. The relationship between foreground and distance as described by Benjamin cannot be taken for granted when observing the Anastenaria ritual performance 28. It is shifting, including steps forward and back.

Eliminated practices. The act of killing was not witnessed by the participants. I asked how is the balance of the community affected when the violence “itself” is not being seen. I clarified my use of the word violence: violence of the community, violence of the witnesses and ritualistic violence. I argued that such violence coexists with expressions of ‘love’: giving, sharing, taking care of, paying attention to etc. in a surviving ritual performance that flirts with forgetting and elimination.

I argued that the Anastenaria performs a shift from extreme violence (infanticide, cannibalism narrated in the lyrics of the song) to lesser, less uncontrolled and more mediated violence which now seems to be becoming more and more eliminated (for example: the animal sacrifice). In case the sacrifice’s rules are not respected, the community risks entering what Girard has called the sacrificial crisis: communication with the “heavens” and the world of the dead is interrupted.

The discussion on the community via Esposito continued (the Anastenaria community in dialogue with: “*communitas-immunitas*,” “a violent loss of borders” and “the gift”). There were borders at stake, not only between the participants and the witnesses but also inside the community of witnesses. Furthermore, Maria-Lisa and I witnessed the “gift” the Anastenarides were giving and we were affected by it. And

all three of us experienced the “release” Josh spoke of, during the final dance that followed firewalking.

In May 2011 I was invited to participate in the ritual performance. I did “performatively engage” with the Anastenarides as a participant and through this I continued witnessing. This more active part of my co-performance that consisted of wearing the *semadi*, walking towards the fire with the participants, holding the candle next to them, and walking in the final circle with them, allowed me to still be able to watch. This time, I literally watched more closely, while I was also being watched by the witnesses. I concluded that it was different to participate.

Furthermore, some new observations produced new conclusions regarding the relationship Anastenaria-aspects of performing for the stage that was examined in Part One of this thesis. Drawing from Josh Hoglund’s analysis of the ritualistic practices, I argued that when the avant garde theatrical experiments of the past and the present centuries which are in dialogue with ritual seem to neglect the basic idea and practice of witnessing and participating as involving the passage to a non-ritual state, they risk trying to formalistically “turn theatre into ritual” in vain.

The continuation of the Anastenaria practices that incorporates their elimination in its relation to the ecstatic element in performance and co-performative witnessing as a method of observing constitute conditions under which the survival of this ritual performance is confirmed (each time).

Contribution

This thesis drew upon the Anastenaria as observed in Langadas in May 2009, May 2010 and May 2011. I believe that it will contribute to the existing bibliography on the Anastenaria in the following ways. First, the Anastenaria, qualified as a ritual performance, was understood as dynamic, in motion, including not only practices that are repeated, but also others that disappear and re-emerge.

Second, in my following the particular strand of performance studies that focuses on ritual performance, I tried to suggest a new way of engaging with the Anastenaria, by providing a flexible methodological tool for its understanding each time, a tool that can facilitate reflecting on it as it is changing. I suggested witnessing as a co-performance of return. I employed the ethnographic model of what Dwight Conquergood called ‘the co-performer/witness’ to reflect upon a ritual performance of return, repetition, recurrence. My returns to the field involved entering into a dialogue with the participants and gradually discovering their community through participation. Visiting Langadas more than once and interviewing the same people over the period of three years, enabled me not only to respond “in the moment” with the Anastenarides and their practices, but also to constantly challenge my own observations and outcomes on a phenomenon that is both repetitive and changing.

Third, the Anastenaria was related to theatrical performance through an exploration of its ecstatic dimension that did not draw upon the links with the ancient past but upon certain observations that offered a better understanding of the relation between inspiration, consciousness and technique. Such a stance enables the thinker/practitioner to shed new light on specific performative aspects of the ritual (such as

the lyrics of the songs) and re-think the relationship between witnessing the ritual and performing for the stage.

This route to understanding shares something with a Performance Studies tradition of ethnographic interest, while reasserting the dialogue with stage practice. There are some understandable caveats one might bring to such an ambition but establishing the following principles served as a framework for discussion. Theories emphasizing theatre's ritualistic origin, and theatrical avant-garde claims that a 'return' to the ritual would reinvigorate the stage have received considerable criticism. However, the extensive amount of studies that have co-examined ritual and theatre, together with my field work, led me to the conclusion that the two are distinct yet kin forms. This particular ritual has a potential for reading across to stage work in which I am involved and academically engaged. Ritual and theatre were considered in their interrelationship, which involves changes, recurrences, a give-and-take process.

This thesis will, I hope, contribute to the existing bibliography of Performance Studies by encouraging academics and practitioners to think about the survival of the Anastenaria ritual performance through the dynamic method of a co-performer witness and the relationship between witnessing the ritual and performing for the stage. It was through the above lenses that survival (of the participant, of the community, of the ritual performance itself) was sought.

Endnotes

Anastenaria Vocabulary

1. Hourmouziadis, Anastasios, *Peri ton Anastenarion ke allon tinon paradoxon ethimon ke prolipseon, Arhion tou Thrakikou Laografikou ke Glossikou thisavrou* 26:144-161, 1961. (Originally published in 1873 in Constantinople by Tipos Anatolikou Asteros.), p. 4: The magnificent spectacle of nature amazes the inhabitants' imagination. Their soul is overcome by surprise and ecstasy. They see the invisible and hear the inaudible, their nervous system is shattered and they become Anastenaria. See also Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka: Ek tis simerinis laikis latrias ton Thrakon*, Athens, 1963; Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka: Aspects of the Popular Thracian Worship of To-day*, Athens, G.C. Eleftheroudakis, 1965, p.21: Before the sacred icon an initiate uttering ecstatic cries and restricting his movements to one place would begin to dance, or rather to beat his feet monotonously but vigorously, intensifying the ecstasy that had taken possession of his being.
2. See Hourmouziadis, *ibid*, p.4; Xygalatas, Dimitris, "Ethnography, Historiography and the Making of History in the Tradition of the Anastenaria", *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 22, No. 1, March 2011, p.58: The Anastenaria are religious communities of Orthodox Christians, known for their devotion to Saints Constantine and Helen and the fire-walking rituals they perform in their honour.
3. See Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.ix: The object of its translation into a language spoken in most parts of the world is to make more widely known two customs relating to worship of the Thracian Greeks and still in use among them.
4. Danforth, Loring, *Firewalking and Religious Healing; the Anastenaria in Greece and the American Firewalking Movement*, 1979, p.4: The primary aim of this book is to offer an interpretation of the Anastenaria, a northern Greek ritual involving firewalking and spirit possession which is performed by a group of refugees from eastern Thrace, known as Kostilides, who settled in Greece Macedonia in the early 1920s. See Kakouri, *ibid*, p. 16: They (the icons) are thought to be "strength" or "power-giving" and are carried by the Anastenarides at definite stages of their ritual; see also Gousgounis, Nikos, "The Transgressing Character of the Sacred in the Double Ritual of Anastenaria", *Stud. Tribes Tribals*, 1(2): 127-140, 2003.
5. Sansom, Jane A., "Appropriating Social Energy: The Generation, Accumulation, and Conversion of Capital in the Performance of the Anastenária", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Volume 19, Number 1, May 2001, pp. 143-168, p.143: The Anastenária, a ritual complex observed in several villages in northern Greece, is most famous for its 21 May performance in celebration of Saints Constantine and Helen. This performance, which includes music, dancing, prayer, the sacrificing of animals, and a firewalk, has become a popular tourist attraction, resulting in some cultural commodification of the ritual and its central objects, the icons.
6. Georgieva, Ivanichka "Le feu et la croix", *Ethnologie française* 2/2001 (Vol. 31), p. 251-260.
7. See Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.168.

8. Papataxiarches, Efthymios, Loizos, Peter, *Constested Identities, Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece*, Princeton Modern Greek Studies, Princeton University Press, 1991, p.109.

9. Dewalt, Kathleen M. and Dewalt, Billie R., *Participant Observation; A Guide for Fieldworkers*, Oxford, AltaMira Press, 2002, p.1: For anthropologists and social scientists, participant observation is a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture. And p.5: While Malinowski was the first to describe this approach as a research method, he was not the first person or the first anthropologist to practice it. The first anthropologist to write about using something akin to participant observation was Frank Hamilton Cushing.

10. Conquergood, Dwight, "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics", in *Turning Points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief*, edited by Y.S. Lincoln and N.K. Denzin, 2003, London, Alta Mira Press, p.188: The power dynamic of the research situation changes when the ethnographer moves from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer to the intimate involvement and engagement of "co-activity" or co-performance with historically situated, named, "unique individuals."

11. See Danforth, *op.cit.*, 1979, p.82.

21. See Kakouri, *op.cit.*, p.21: The fact of being thus possessed carries with it the ability to walk on fire (votive act by the devotees to the Saint) while remaining unharmed by it ("the Saint's gift to the devotees").

13. See Danforth, *op.cit.*, p.19.

14. See Danforth, *ibid*, p.5: They also believe that it is Saint Constantine who possesses them when they dance and protects them from getting burned when they perform their spectacular acts of firewalking.

15. See Danforth, Loring M., "The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* - Volume 2, Number 1, May 1984, p.70: Another important feature of the ideological context which informs Hourmouziadis' discussion of the Anastenaria is the opposition which the Orthodox Church has shown and continues to show toward the Anastenaria.

16. Xygalatas, Dimitris, 2011, "Ethnography, Historiography and the Making of History in the Tradition of the Anastenaria", *History and Anthropology* 22 (1): 57–74, p.71: As we have seen, the inaccurate descriptions and biased interpretations that have been published by various ethnographers for their own purposes and agendas are, to a large degree, responsible for the ongoing tension between the Anastenaria and the Greek Orthodox Church.

17. See Hourmouziadis, *op.cit.*, p.6.

Chapter One

1. Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*, London, John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1871.
2. Hodgen, Margaret T., *The Doctrine of Survivals: The History of an Idea*, originally published in *American Anthropologist*, 33:307-324, 1931.
3. Stocking, George W., Jr., "The Ethnographer's Magic: Fieldwork in British Anthropology From Tylor to Malinowski." In *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. History of Anthropology Series, vol. 1. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
4. Conquergood, Dwight, "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the ethnography of performance". In *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief*, ed. By Y.S. Lincoln and N.K. Denzin, London, Alta Mira Press, 2003, pp.407-408.
5. Conquergood, Dwight, "Poetics, Play, Process and Power: the Performative Turn in Anthropology." In *A Cultural Approach to Interpersonal Communication: Essential Readings*, edited by L. Monaghan and J. Goodman. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
6. Conquergood, Dwight, *ibid.*, p. 86.
7. Conquergood, Dwight, *Homeboys and Hoods: Gang Communication and Cultural Space*, Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1993.
8. Conquergood, Dwight, *ibid*, p. 52.
9. Danforth, Loring M., "The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* - Volume 2, Number 1, May 1984, pp. 53-85.
10. Danforth, Loring M., "The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* - Volume 2, Number 1, May 1984, pp. 53-85, p.81; Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka: Ek tis simerinis laikis latrias ton Thrakon*, Athens, 1963; Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka: Aspects of the Popular Thracian Worship of To-day*, Athens, G.C. Eleftheroudakis, 1965, p.117; Michael-Dede, Maria, "To Anastenari; Psychologiki ke Kinoniologiki Theorisi", "The Anastenari; Psychological and Sociological View", *Thrakika*, no 46, 1972-1973, pp. 23-178; D. Xygalatas, I. Konvalinka, A. Roepstoff and J. Bulbulia 2011. "Quantifying collective effervescence: Heart-rate dynamics at a fire-walking ritual", *Communicative & Integrative Biology* 4 (6); Sansom, Jane, "Firewalking: Explanation and the Mind-Body Relationship", *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Volume 9, Issue 2, 2009, p.195.
11. See Danforth, *ibid*, p.71 and 75.

12. Conquergood, Dwight, "Performance Studies, Interventions and Radical Research", *The Drama Review*, MIT Press, summer 2002, p.145-156.
13. Gerou, Katia and Andreadi, Ioli, *When the Heartbeats Change; Discussions on Theatre with Ioli Andreadi*, Athens, Kaleidoskopio, 2010.
14. The claim that the current financial crisis has affected the production of theatrical performance is corroborated when we reflect on recent statistics and arts budget cuts in countries such as Greece, Italy, Portugal and the UK. At the same time, the crisis seems to have affected the theatrical repertory in at least the above countries (see for example Theatre Uncut in 2012 and PIGS at the Royal Court in 2013 in the UK), where artists are trying to creatively address a phenomenon that is affecting their lives as well as the lives of their contemporaries.
15. See Danforth, *op. cit.*, 1989, p.95: The essential feature of the ritual therapy of the Anastenarides is the establishment of a proper relationship with Saint Constantine and the acquisition from him of supernatural power.
16. Megas, as quoted by Danforth, *op. cit.*, 1984, p.81: The ecstatic enthusiasm, which constitutes the basic element (*vasikon stihion*) [of the Anastenaria] has much deeper roots in Thrace. See also Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.117: If the ancient cult of Dionysos, as regards the texture of its artistic aspect, proves how much Attic drama was indebted to ecstatic ceremonies, the present-day Anastenaria contains specimens of catharsis through orgiastic dancing and through the artistically creative ecstasy which may transpire from sacred dancing-rites.
17. Michael- Dede speaks of the "truth of the actions of the Anastenaria" (p. 23-24), the "purest expression of the Greek soul, which blends the Cross with the sword" (p. 27), in Michael-Dede, Maria, "To Anastenari; Psychologiki ke Kinoniologiki Theorisi", "The Anastenari; Psychological and Sociological View", *Thrakika*, no 46, 1972-1973, pp. 23-178.
18. See Danforth's reference to Bourguignon, 1984, p.58, as well as his reference to altered states of consciousness, 1989, p.59: Trance states are altered states of consciousness that can be induced psychologically, physiologically, or pharmacologically.
19. D. Xygalatas, I. Konvalinka, A. Roepstoff and J. Bulbulia 2011. "Quantifying collective effervescence: Heart-rate dynamics at a fire-walking ritual", *Communicative & Integrative Biology* 4 (6)
20. Sansom, Jane, "Firewalking: Explanation and the Mind-Body Relationship", *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Volume 9, Issue 2, 2009, p.195.
21. See Danforth, on the results the folklorists who wrote on continuities have caused on the Anastenarides' perception of the Anastenaria, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.71: When folklorists demonstrate the continuity of Greek culture and the ancient and glorious origins of the Anastenaria, they are at the same time providing Church officials with evidence they can use in their longstanding attempts to suppress the Anastenaria. And more explicitly so in Xygalatas, 20011, *op. cit.*, p.71: After a short initial period,

people would freely talk to me about particularly sensitive subjects, such as their financial situation, health problems, politics, and interpersonal relations. It was only their rituals that were almost taboo, and the reason for this - often offered explicitly - was their discontent with what people had written about them in the past.

22. See Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.75.

23. See Mackintosh, Fiona, *The Cambridge Companion of tragedy*, edited by P. E. Easterling, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.314.

24. See Csapo and Miller, *op. cit.*, p.3.

25. Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.117.

26. See Kakouri, *ibid*, p.6: The object of this study, the Kalogeros of Kosti, is one of the many dromena of the Dionysiac cycle. It is impossible, however, to neglect the fact that the worship of the Anastenaria is bound up with it.

27. See Kakouri, *ibid*, p.111: The Kalogeros of to-day is considered by the author as providing us with a theatrical model of an unrefined pre-Thespian type.

28. Vizyenos, G., "The Kalogeroi and the Worship of Dionysos in Thrace", *Thrace: Thracian Yearbook*, 1897.

29. Freud, Sigmund, *Totem and Taboo*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999.

30. Eliade, Mircea, *History of Religious Ideas, Volume 1: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, transl. by Willard R. Trask, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981.

31. Pers. Comm., 23/05/2011.

32. Pers. Comm, 16/12/2010.

33. Conquergood, Dwight, "Performance Studies, Interventions and Radical Research", *The Drama Review*, MIT Press, summer 2002, p.145-156.

34. Read, Alan, *Theatre and Everyday Life, An Ethics of Performance*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p.9.

35. Blair, Rhonda, *The Actor, Image and Action, Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008.

36. Stanislavski, Konstantin, 1936: 50. This reference also constitutes one of the main sources of inspiration that Rhonda Blair used in order to maintain her argument in her valuable book on actor training using the insights of cognitive neuroscience.

37. Blair, Rhonda, *op.cit*, p.xi.

38. Carlson, Marvin, *The Haunted Stage, The Theatre as Memory Machine*, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2001.
39. See Schechner, 1988, *op. cit.*, p.130.
40. See Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.92.
41. For example the use of Yoruba from Teatro Buendia of Cuba in the production of Euripides' *Bacchae*.
42. Levi-Strauss, Claude, *Tristes Tropiques*, translated by John and Doreen Weightman, New York: Penguin Books, 1992.
43. Wiles, David, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy: From Ancient Festival to Modern Experimentation*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.116.
44. See Carlson, *op. cit.*, p.11.
45. Schechner, Richard, *The Future of Ritual; Writings on Culture and Performance*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 20-21; Conquergood, Lorne Dwight, "Performance Studies Interventions and Radical Research¹", TDR: The Drama Review, Volume 46, Number 2 (T 174), Summer 2002, pp. 145-156, Published by The MIT Press p.152.
46. Conquergood, Dwight, *op.cit.*, 2003, p.149.
47. See for example Danforth, Loring M., "Power through Submission in the Anastenaria", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*. 1:203-223. 1983 p.212: On the morning of May 21 the Anastenarides sacrifice a black lamb to Saint Constantine. Afterwards they dance in the konaki until the evening, when they are notified that the large fire which had been lit several hours earlier in an open area near the edge of the village has burned down to form a huge mass of glowing red coals. Then they proceed barefoot from the konaki to the site of the fire, where several thousand people have gathered to witness the spectacular firewalk.
48. See Hourmouziadis, *op. cit.*, p.7.
49. See Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.70.
50. See Xygalatas, *op. cit.*, p.9.
51. See Hourmouziadis, *op. cit.*, p.22.
52. See Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.70.
53. See Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.11: The earliest evidence to hand is the eye-witness description by a Bulgarian, P. Slawejkoff, of the villages of Madschura and Kosti (1866), followed by the aforementioned study by Chourmouziadis (1873), based on field research in Kosti itself.

54. See Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.25: “sinchronous martyrias”, p.25; Danforth translates it as “contemporary evidence”, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.78.
55. See Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p. x; see also Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.85.
56. See Hourmouziadis, also Romaios, K.A., “Laikes Latrías tis Thrakis” (The Popular Worship of Thrace), ΑΘΛΓΘ, v. XI, 1944-5, Megas, G., *Ellinike eorte ke Ethima Laikis Latrias* (Greek Festivals and the Customs of Popular Worship), Athens 1957, as well as Kakouri’s, Danforth’s and Xygalatas’ position within the discourse on the Anastenaria and the continuities in Greek culture and how this position affected their individual descriptions and definitions of the Anastenaria. These cases are all being discussed in some detail in Chapter One.
57. Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.85.
58. Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.117: The “holy madness” which the Anastenarides have preserved and which, through the intoxication of dancing in ecstasy, leads the devotees to the mystic shedding of their own being in the search, on the highest plane, for absolute union with their protector, St. Constantine, also reveals much in respect of innermost creative elaboration.
59. Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.74.
60. Hourmouziadis, *op. cit.*, p.10.
61. Hourmouziadis, *ibid*, p.12.
62. See Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.9.
63. See also Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, in which he sustains that Kakouri is using old sources and she has probably not observed hill-climbing herself and Xygalatas, *op. cit.*, agreeing with him.
64. This excerpt also forms part of Narrative One on the Anastenaria that is being commented upon as part of Chapter Two.
65. See Danforth, 1989, *op. cit.*, p.4.
66. Politis, Nikolaos G., *Paradoseis A & B*, editions GRAMMATA.
67. Vizyenos, George, “The Kalogeroi and the worship of Dionysos in Thrace”, Thracian yearbook, Athens 1988, pp. 102-127.
68. Dawkins, H. W., “The modern carnival in Thrace and the cult of Dionysos”, JHS, v. XXXI (1906), pp. 191-206
69. Rhode, Erwin, *Psyche*, translated by W. B. Hillis, Oxford, Routledge, 2000.
70. Jeanmaire, Henri, *Dionysos: Histoire du culte de Bacchus*, Paris, Payot, 1951.

71. Kakouri, Katerina, *op.cit.*, commentary on picture 10.
72. Kakouri, Katerina, *ibid.* See “bacchants”, “mystai” - initiates to the mysteries, instead of “Anastenarides” - “oistropliktos” - inspired - and “oreivasia” - sacred hill-climbing.
73. Kakouri, Katerina, *ibid.*, commentary on picture 12.
74. Schechner, Richard, *The Future of Ritual; Writings on Culture and Performance*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p. 20-21: I am enthusiastic about the expanding field of performance and its scholarly adjunct, performance studies. Performative analysis is not the only interpretation possible, but it is a very effective method for a time of charged rhetorics, simulations and scenarios, and games played on a global scale. It has always been a good method for looking at small-scale, face-to-face interactions. (...) The broad spectrum (of performance) includes performative behavior, not just the performing arts, as a subject for serious scholarly study. (...) These studies are intensely interdisciplinary, intercultural, and intergeneric.
75. Conquergood, Lorne Dwight, “Performance Studies Interventions and Radical Research1”, *TDR: The Drama Review*, Volume 46, Number 2 (T 174), Summer 2002, pp. 145-156, Published by The MIT Press p.152: Performance studies is uniquely suited for the challenge of braiding together disparate and stratifying ways of knowing. We can think through performance along three crisscrossing lines of activity and analysis. We can think of performance as a work of imagination, as an object of study; as a pragmatics of inquiry (both as model and method), as an optic and operator of research; as a tactics of intervention, an alternative space of struggle.
76. Conquergood, Dwight, *ibid.*, p.151.
77. Conquergood, Dwight, *ibid.*, p.151.
78. Conquergood, Dwight, “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the ethnography of performance”. In *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in a handkerchief*, ed. By Y.S. Lincoln and N.K. Denzin, London, Alta Mira Press, 2003, pp.407-408, p.149.
79. Conquergood, Dwight, *op.cit.*, 2002, p.153.
80. See Carlson, Marvin, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, London, Routledge, 1996, p.26.
81. Taussig, Michael, *What Color is The Sacred?*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p.94.
82. Taussig, Michael, *Walter Benjamin's Grave*, Chicago and London, Chicago University Press, 2006, p.15.
83. Carlson, *op. cit.*, p.25.

84. Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Volume 1, 1913-1926, "One-Way Street, Lost-And-Found Office", Harvard University Press, 2003, p.468.

85. See Conquergood, 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

86. Seferis, George, *Poems*, Athens, Ikaros, 1977. The above translation from Greek is mine.

87. See endnote 1.

88. Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.13.

89. Hourmouziadis, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

90. Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, on Fallmereyer, p. 66.

91. Danforth, 1984, *op. cit.*, p.71 and p. 85.

92. Xygalatas, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

93. The policy of the Church of Constantinople concerning cultural continuity and folklore was not necessarily the same with that of the Greek state. Even at the interior of the Church the spiritual and political divergences were so important that references to the Church as an undifferentiated entity are not pertinent. On one hand the ideas of the Enlightenment were first propagated in the Ottoman Empire by Patriarchs such as Kyrillos Loukaris during the eighteenth century. On the other hand, several other Patriarchs demonstrated particularly reactionary attitudes.

94. Among them, several quite important like Adamantios Korais and recently - at the end of the 20th century - Cornilios Castoriadis totally rejected the Byzantine and Orthodox Christian past, while others like Paparrigopoulos, Papadiamantis and Elytis have considered it as a valuable source of political and/or cultural inspiration.

95. Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.177: The past is a crucial component of the social identity of the Kostilides. In many ways the Anastenaria is a celebration of this past, a celebration of the origin and the history of the community of Kostilides. It is a festival of remembrance in which the Kostilides continually re-create their past through powerful symbolic performances involving saints, icons, music, and dance. Like a memorial service for the dead, the Anastenaria resurrects the people and the places of a past that has been lost. It enables the Kostilides of the present to enter into a symbolic conversation with the Kostilides of the past. In this way Kostilides are able to assert a continuity with their ancestors and to define themselves in terms of their collective past.

96. Xygalatas, *op. cit.*, p.59: This, in broad lines, is what we can tell with any certainty about the recent history of the Anastenaria, based on ethnographic and historical evidence as well as on personal reports.

97. Read, Alan, 'Abandoned Practices,' Zagreb, *Performance Studies International* 15, 2009, p.2.

98. Esposito, Roberto, *Communitas, The Origin and Destiny of Community*, transl. by Timothy Campbell, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2010, p.8.

99. See for an example of the aforementioned conflicting nationalisms and the different historical versions presented by them the site of UNESCO on the Nestinarstvo:

<http://www.unescobg.org/culture/bulich/?language=us&article=documents§ion=ich&post=2>, in which the Orthodox Church is mentioned as the reason why some of the inhabitants of the "Greek village of Kosti" abandoned the ritual: "Although the Nestinari carrying an icon of Saints Constantine and Helena (Emperor Constantine the Great (who gave Christianity a legal status equal to the other religions in the Roman Empire with the Edict of Milan) and his mother Saint Helena) when treading on the embers, the ritual has never been acknowledged by the Church, which persecuted it and the Nestinari dancers were demonized as possessed by the devil. The last severe persecution began in 1913. It was then when some Nestinari from the Greek village of Kosti, some of whom were banished from the village after the 1912-1918 wars, gave up the ritual. In the period from 1941-42 nestinarstvo dances were preserved in only three villages: Bulgari, Kosti, and Gramatikovo, where it remained until 1948-1949. The original ritual was reinstated at the beginning of the 1990s".

100. See Xygalatas, *op. cit.*, on the opposition of the Church in Langadas, p.14: In 1954, local priests and teachers in Langadas protested against the practice of the Anastenaria. As a result, the fire-walkers decided to hold the festival indoors that year, without music and processions. The local bishop refused the church's services to the fire-walkers and their children. The Anastenaria were further refused Holy Communion and were not allowed to get married, become best men or have their children baptized, unless they signed an affidavit that they would never fire-walk in the future. In 1973, the prosecutor of the criminal court of Thessaloniki ordered the police to conduct an investigation into the Anastenaria, after the Bishop's request (Megas 1974: 3). During the three days that the festival lasted, the bells of the cathedral were tolling mournfully.

101. See Danforth, 1989, *op. cit.*, p.179: The Anastenaria, then, is a celebration of the past. In Greece, however, there is not just one past; there are many, each contributing in different ways and for different segments of society to a definition of the present. One of these pasts which plays an important part in the Anastenaria is the early Christian and Byzantine past whose most powerful symbol is Constantinople, the city founded by Saint Constantine himself.

102. Eliade, Mircea, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or: Cosmos and History*, transl. by Willard R. Trask, Princeton University Press, 1954, p.4.

103. Roach, Joseph, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, p.42.

104. See Schieffelin, E.L., "Problematising Performance", published in: Felicia Hughes-Freeland: *Ritual, Performance, Media*, (ASA Monograph no.35), Routledge,

pp.194-207, 1997: In the last ten or fifteen years anthropologists interested in cultural performances (religious rituals, political pageants, folk entertainments, curing ceremonies, spirit séances and so on) have moved increasingly away from studying them as systems of representations (symbolic transformations, cultural texts) to looking at them as processes of practice and performance.

105. Dawkins, R.M., “The modern Carnival in Thrace and the Cult of Dionysos”, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1906, Jeanmaire, Henri, *Dionysos, Histoire du culte de Bacchus*, Paris 1951, Gousgounis, Nikos, “The Transgressing Character of the Sacred in the Double Ritual of Anastenaria”, *Stud. Tribes Tribals*, 1(2): 127-140, 2003, Sansom, Jane, “Firewalking: explanation and the mind-body relationship”, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, August 1, 1998.

106. Schechner, Richard, *Performance Theory*, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p.24.

107. Kertzer, D.I., *Ritual, Politics and Power*, London, Yale University Press, 1988, p.9.

108. Turner, Victor, *On the Edge of the Bush*, Arizona, The University of Arizona Press, 1985, p. 158-159.

109. *Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. by Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer, London and New York, Routledge, 2001, p.491.

110. *The origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond, From Ritual to Drama*, ed. by Eric Csapo and Margaret S. Miller, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.4.

111. Georgoudi, Stella, ‘Sacrifice et Consommation de Jeunes Animaux en Grece Ancienne’, *Anthropozoologica : Numero special* 1988, p.75.

112. This material forms part of my field research in 2009 and it is also used as part of the first narrative on 2009 (Chapter Three).

113. Gausset, Quentin, Kenrick, Justin and Gibb, Robert, “Indigeneity and Autochthony: A Couple of False Twins?” *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* (2011)19, 2 135–142. See p.136 on indigenous peoples: “Historically speaking, indigenous peoples are often descendants of populations inhabiting areas that have been settled by others. Most have been dispossessed and pushed to the fringes of the resources that they once relied on. Indigenous peoples thus occupy today a marginal and minority position within nation-states.”

114. See Schechner, *op. cit.*, p.228.

115. Romaios, Constantinos, “Observations on the text of the demotic songs of Thrace”, *Praktika B Sibosiu Laografias, Idrima Meleton Hersonisu tu Emu*, Thessaloniki, 1976.

116. By “other symbolic expressions of the Greek people” I mean here: the rebetiko folk songs, the various forms of Carnival celebrations and the Greek shadow theatre of Karaghiozis.

Chapter Two

1. Hourmouziadis, Anastasios, *Peri ton Anastenarion ke allon tinon paradoxon ethimon ke prolipseon*, Arhion tou Thrakikou Laografikou ke Glossikou thisavrou 26:144-161, 1961. (Originally published in 1873 in Constantinople by Tipos Anatolikou Asteros.), p. 4: The magnificent spectacle of nature amazes the inhabitants' imagination. Their soul is overcome by surprise and ecstasy. They see the invisible and hear the inaudible, their nervous system is shattered and they become Anastenaria. See also Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka: Ek tis simerinis laikis latrias ton Thrakon*, Athens, 1963; Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka: Aspects of the Popular Thracian Worship of To-day*, Athens, G.C. Eleftheroudakis, 1965, p.21: Before the sacred icon an initiate uttering ecstatic cries and restricting his movements to one place would begin to dance, or rather to beat his feet monotonously but vigorously, intensifying the ecstasy that had taken possession of his being.

2. See Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.9.: To-day [1963], in the Anastenarian villages of Macedonia, the great public ceremony of the Anastenaria takes place on the 21st May, the day on which the Orthodox Church commemorates the pioneer of Christianity, St. Constantine, and his mother, St. Helen. The ceremony is also marked by celebrations before and afterwards; it includes most interesting sacred rites of which the most impressive and ceremonial animal sacrifice, ecstatic possession [my italics] by the god-inspired [my italics], who remain unharmed by the fire during the fire-walking rite, and an at present somewhat degenerated «ορειβάσσία» (sacred hill-climbing) by the god-inspired bearing the icons with them.

3. Further bibliography on the relationship between the Anastenaria and the worship of Dionysus includes: Megas, George A., *Greek Calendar Customs*, 3rd ed., Athens, 1982 Tomkinson, John L., *Festive Greece: A Calendar of Tradition*, Anagnosis, Athens, 2003, Wace, A. J. P., "North Greek Festivals and the Worship of Dionysos", *Annual of the British School at Athens*, XVI (1909-10), pp.232-253. It also includes the work of scholars who disagree with the existence of a link between the two, i.e. the Anastenaria originating from the ancient ritual, such as the following: Danforth, Loring M., *Firewalking and Religious Healing: The Anastenaria of Greece and the American Firewalking Movement*, Princeton University Press, (Princeton NJ, 1989), Xygalatas, Dimitris, "Firewalking in the Balkans: High Arousal Rituals and Memory", Ivan Czachesz ed., *Changing Minds: Religion and Cognition through the Ages*, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change Series, Leuven: Peeters forthcoming. Xygalatas, Dimitris, "Firewalking and the Brain: The Physiology of High-Arousal Rituals", in: Joseph Bulbulia, Richard Sosis, Erica Harris, Russell Genet, Cheryl Genet, and Karen Wyman (eds.) *Evolution of Religion: Studies, Theories, and Critiques*, Santa Margarita, CA, Collins Foundation Press 2007, pp. 189-195. Xygalatas, Dimitris, "Introduction to the Cognitive Science of Religion", in the Greek

Translation of Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity* (Greek title: Τύποι Θρησκευτικότητας, Θεσσαλονίκη: Βάνιας 2006), Thessaloniki, Vanias, 2006, pp. 9-92.

4. Vizyenos, G., "The Kalogeroi and the Worship of Dionysos in Thrace", *Thrace: Thracian Yearbook*, 1897.

5. See Kakouri, *op.cit.*, p.6: The object of this study, the Kalogeros of Kosti, is one of the many dromena of the Dionysiac cycle. It is impossible, however, to neglect the fact that the worship of the Anastenaria is bound up with it. And p.111: The Kalogeros of to-day is considered by the author as providing us with a theatrical model of an unrefined pre-Thespian type.

6. Danforth, Loring M., "The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* - Volume 2, Number 1, May 1984, pp. 53-85; Xygalatas, Dimitris, 2011, "Ethnography, Historiography and the Making of History in the Tradition of the Anastenaria", *History and Anthropology* 22 (1): 57-74.

7. See Misopolinou, Anna, "Ecstasy: a Source of Intimacy or Applications of the Dionysiac Model for Grotowski's Theatre", Source: <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0101/annamisopolinou.html>.

8. See Misopolinou, *ibid*, p. 10.

9. *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness, and Social Change*, edited by Erika Bourguignon, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1973.

10. Henneberg, M. and Saniotis, A., "Evolutionary origins of human brain and spirituality", *Anthropologischer Anzeiger*, December 2009, 67 (4): 427-438.

11. Saniotis, A., Henneberg, M., "Explorations into the Biology of Emotion and Religious Experience", *International Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 26 - n.1-2 (25-36) - 2011, p. 28.

12. First category: the discourse on the Anastenaria and the Dionysiac rituals. Examples of this discourse can be found in: Kakouri, Katerina, *op. cit.*; Akrita, Taki, *Thrace. Ancient and Modern Life*, Athens, Akrita Taki, 1968; Kourtidis, Konstantinos, "The Anastenaria and the Skylouthifera; The Dionysian Tradition in Thrace", *Records of Thracian Folklore & Linguistic Treasures* 5, 1938-39, 90-95; Kousiadis, Georgios, "The Anastenaria and their Dances", *Records of Thracian Folklore & Linguistic Treasures* 21, 1956, 279-8, Mouratidou, Katerina, "Dancetherapy Elements in Ancient and Modern Greece." *Journal of Sport Science. Exercise & Society* 18, 1997, 65-72. Romeos, Kostas, "The Popular Worship in Thrace—Characteristics and Particularities", *proc. of the Symposium on IMXA*, (in Greek), 5-9 Dec. 1985, Thessaloniki, 1988.

13. An incorporation of theories of anthropology, psychology and/or neuroscience can be found in the work of performance studies scholars such as: Schechner, Richard, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985; Peggy

Phelan, Unmarked, *The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993; Bryan Reynolds, *Transversal Enterprises in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, (2008) Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

14. Barba, Eugenio and Savarese, Nicola, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology, The Secret Art of the Performer*, London and New York, Centre for Performance Research/Routledge, 1991, p.5.

15. Eldeman, Gerald and Tononi, Giulio, *A Universe of Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination*, New York, Basic Books, 2000.

16. Blair, Rhonda, *The Actor, Image and Action, Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008.

17. Blair, Rhonda, *ibid*, p. 21.

18. Cosmas, Nik., *Langadas, History and Folklore*, 1968, Society of Macedonian Studies.

19. Cosmas, Nik., *ibid*, p. 29.

20. For the meaning of the word *konaki* see the Anastenaria Vocabulary that forms part of Chapter One.

21. For the discussion on eliminated practices see Chapter Four.

22. Part of my methodology was the decision to return not only to Langadas but also to the same *konaki* in 2010 and 2011. For the discussion on the Anastenaria as a ritual performance of return see Chapter One as well as Chapters Four, Five and Six.

23. For more on this matter see Chapters Four, Five and especially Chapter Six.

24. See endnote 1.

25. Repetition plays a significant part in the Anastenaria, enabling the participants to enter an ecstatic state, like it happens in yoga and other meditative practices. See Fromm, Erika, "Altered States of Consciousness and Ego Psychology", *Social Service Review*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Dec., 1976), pp. 557-569, Published by: The University of Chicago Press, Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30015411>, p.563: The yogi, after years of practice, is able to hold his mind to a single stimulus for very long periods and to exclude any other mental content from coming into awareness. Tibetan texts call this "stopping the mind". The object to which the meditator devotes his total attention may be a repeated sound (om-om), an external object, or an internal image.

26. Fromm, Erika, *ibid*, p.564: Such concentrative meditation – found in most Indian yogic and orthodox Buddhist systems, as well as in the currently fashionable Westernized offshoot, TM – initially requires unusually great ego-activity. Attention must strenuously be focused and held on the chosen object, and all other stimuli must actively be prevented from entering awareness. Thus, concentrative meditation, at

least for a number of years, requires much ego activity. Later this attentional stance becomes automatized.

27. Fromm, Erika, *ibid*, p.560: Ego receptivity is the prevailing state in many of the healthy uses of altered states of consciousness. Examples are states of profound cognitive relaxation such as the mystical, transcendental, revelatory states attained in Buddhist and Tibetan meditation (satori, nirvana). And p.562: There are, on the other hand, certain types of altered states of consciousness in which there is an increased alertness, a heightened ability to work with preconscious and unconscious processes when conscious logic has come to an impasse. Such, for instance, is the inspirational phase of the creative process, artistic or scientific. The individual has focused upon a problem. He has probably defined it in a lucid set of cognition, of goal-directed thinking. Now he allows his focused attention to relax, he opens himself up to the spontaneous input from preconscious memory, from the archaic modes of understanding dominated by the logic of imagery.

28. Fromm, Erika, *ibid*, p.561. Other altered states of consciousness can be produced either by overstimulation – for example, the annihilation of cognitive processes in the emotional frenzy caused by the overly great input of sensory stimulation from a hard-rock band – or by understimulation - for example, the daydreaming of the bored child in school.

29. Fromm, Erika, *ibid*, p.566: The user of psychedelic drugs has the feeling that he sees and experiences a new reality, a reality that lies beyond ordinary reality and is more real than the “normal” day-by-day reality in which he lives. The experience is often described as if veils after veils were being lifted from the ordinary environment revealing that which lies behind it. The individual feels he can now see a much “better”, a “cosmic” reality, that is, if he has a good trip. If he has a bad trip the imagery is frightening, overwhelming, and cannot be handled smoothly by the ego.

30. Nakamura, Jeanne, & Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, “Flow theory and research” In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology*, 2009, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.195-206.

31. See Greenfield, Susan, “Altered States of Consciousness”, *Social Research*, Vol. 68, No. 3, (FALL 2001), pp. 609-626, Published by: The New School Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971902>, op. cit., p.615 .

32. See Greenfield, *ibid*, p.623.

33. See Xygalatas, Dimitris, “Fire-walking and the Brain: The Physiology of High-Arousal Rituals”, in: J. Bulbulia, R. Sosis, E. Harris, R. Genet, C. Genet, and K. Wyman (eds.) *Evolution of Religion: Studies, Theories, and Critiques*, Santa Margarita, CA: Collins Foundation Press, 2008, pp. 189-195. For further changes in the body of the firewalkers, see D. Xygalatas, I. Konvalinka, A. Roepstorff, and J. Bulbulia. “Quantifying collective effervescence: Heart-rate dynamics at a fire-walking ritual”, *Communicative & Integrative Biology* 4 (6): 735-738, 2011. And I. Konvalinka, D. Xygalatas, J. Bulbulia, U. Schjødt, E-M. Jegindø, S. Wallot, G. Van Orden, and A. Roepstorff. “Synchronized arousal between performers and related

spectators in a fire-walking ritual”, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2011.

34. Richards, William A., “Entheogens in the Study of Religious Experiences: Current Status”, Journal of Religion and Health, Vol. 44, No. 4, Winter 2005, DOI: 10.1007/s10943-005-7177-8, p.380.

Chapter Three

1. Richards, William A., “Entheogens in the Study of Religious Experiences: Current Status”, Journal of Religion and Health, Vol. 44, No. 4, Winter 2005, DOI: 10.1007/s10943-005-7177-8, p.380.

2. Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka, Aspects of the Popular Thracian Religion of Today*, Athens, G. C. Eleftheroudakis, 1965.

3. Kakouri, *ibid*, p. 6.

4. Vizyenos, G., “The Kalogeroi and the Worship of Dionysos in Thrace”, Thrace: Thracian Yearbook, 1897.

5. Kakouri, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

6. See Narrative Two in Chapter Five on Babis Papadopoulos’ description and my analysis.

7. On the avant-gardes that used ritual as a means to reinvigorate their theatrical craft, see: Ivanov, Vsevolod, *Po Zvyozdam* ('By the stars'), Petersburg, 1909; Innes, Christopher, *Holy Theatre, Ritual and the Avant Garde*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984; Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*, New York, Routledge, 2005; Lecoq, Jacques, *Theatre of Movement and Gesture*, edited by David Bradby, London and New York, Routledge, 2006. In the same book Jean-Louis Barrault talks about the importance of breath, p. 56: “Gesture is breathed or there is no gesture. Just as Claudelian verse is breathed or one doesn’t hear it, one doesn’t understand it.”

8. Artaud, Antonin, *Oeuvres Complètes, IV, Le Theatre et son Double* : « *Le Théâtre et la Peste* », « *En finir avec les Chefs-d’œuvre* », *Les Cenci*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964.

9. The three directors’s work, such as Grotowski’s *Towards A Poor Theatre*, Barba’s *The Paper Canoe* and Beck’s *The Life of the Theatre*, has also been translated in Greek.

10. Schechner, Richard, *Performance Theory*, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 71.

11. See Schechner, *ibid*, p. 130.
12. Schechner, *ibid*, p.130.
13. On the link to Saint Constantine and to Kostilides past see Chapter One. On walking on fire see Chapters Two, Four and Six. On the witnesses becoming participants and the witnesses being affected see Chapters Four, Five and Six.
14. Schechner, *op. cit.*, p.130.
15. Schechner, *ibid*, p. 130
16. Carlson, Marvin, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, The University of Michigan Press, 2005, p.15: "Everything in the theatre, the bodies, the materials utilized, the language, the space itself, is now and has always been an essential part of the theatre's meaning to and reception by its audiences in all times and all places". Roach, Joseph, *Cities of The Dead, Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996: "Even in death actors' roles tend to stay with them. They gather in the memory of audiences, like ghosts, as each new interpretation of a role sustains or upsets expectations derived from the previous ones".
17. On the first interviews with the participants see Chapter Four.
18. Danforth, Loring, *Firewalking and Religious Healing, The Anastenaria of Greece and the American Firewalking Movement*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, p.19.
19. On the detailed description of the procession in 2009 see Chapter Four.
20. See Kakouri, *op. cit.*, p.25: "Tending the fire and keeping it burning is the office of one particular initiate, who inherits this privilege from his forbears".
21. Kierkegaard, Soren, *Fear And Trembling*, London, Penguin Classics, 1986.
22. Hirst, David L., Giorgio Strehler, *Directors in Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
23. Stanislavski on stage charm: "It is an indefinable, intangible quality; it is an inexplicable charm of an actor's whole being; it transforms even his deficiencies into assets. His idiosyncrasies and shortcomings become things to be copied by his admirers. Such an actor can permit himself anything—even bad acting. All that is required of him is that he come out on the stage as frequently and remain as long as possible, so that his audience can see, gaze upon and enjoy its idol.", as found in Roach, "It", *Theatre Journal* Volume 56, Number 4, December 2004pp. 555-568, p.557.
24. Roach on "It": "Stanislavski recognizes the power of It, conspiring with the all-too-willing audience, to displace competing artistic considerations, including taste, by imposing the personality of the actor on them all. What Quinn calls "the illusion of

absolute presence,” a good working definition of stardom, emerges from an apparently singular nexus of personal quirks, irreducible to type, yet paradoxically the epitome of a type or prototype that almost everyone eventually wants to see or be like.” See Roach, *ibid*, p.557.

25. By ‘co-performer witness on stage’, I am referring to: a) Dwight Conquergood’s term ‘co-performer witness’, that is used in the second part of my thesis, in Chapters Four, Five and Six, b) more generally, to his view on the dialectics between theory and practice as explained in “Performance Studies, Interventions and Radical Research”, Conquergood refers to this particular dialectics between theory and practice, as mentioned in Chapter One: “If we go the one-way street of abstraction, then we cut ourselves off from the nourishing ground of participatory experience. If we go the one-way street of practice, then we drive ourselves into an isolated cul-de-sac, a practitioner’s workshop or artist’s colony. Our radical move is to turn, and return, insistently, to the crossroads”. I am also referring to c) the necessary duality of the people who deal with the world of the stage, whether they are referred to as ‘academics’ or as ‘artists’, that is addressed by Alan Read in *Theatre and Everyday Life* (see Chapter One) as follows: “The idea of thoughtless practice any more than unpractised thought is absurd. My understanding of what theatre is cannot tolerate such separation”.

26. The discussion on forgotten/abandoned practices, via Isabelle Stengers and Alan Read, forms part of the theoretical framework of Chapter Four.

27. On the relationship between analogy and metaphor see Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings*, ed. By Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Volume 1, 1913-1926, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, p. 207: Analogy is presumably a metaphorical similarity – that is to say, a similarity of relations – whereas only substances can be similar in a real (nonmetaphorical) sense. The similarity of two triangles, for example, would have to show the similarity of some ‘substance’ within them whose manifestation would then be the identity [Gleichheit] (not similarity!) of certain relations they had in common.)

28. Performance Research: A Journal of Performing Arts, on Performing Literatures, Rebellato, Dan, “When we talk of horses, Or, what do we see when we see a play?” Performance Research, 14:1, 2009, p.17-28.

29. See Rebellato, Dan, *ibid*, p.19.

30. The necessity of fear is something addressed by theatre artists such as Jean-Louis Barrault, as mentioned for example in *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, edited by Vicki K. Kanik, New York, Greenwood Press, 1998, p.72.

31. The expression was used by Karolos Koun in rehearsals at the Greek Art Theatre. It was also used by his successor as Artistic Director of the theatre Giorgos Lazanis in rehearsals and his classes at the Art Theatre Drama School and then by actress Katia Gerou in her classes at the same School.

32. <http://www.tiscali.co.uk/entertainment/film/biography/artist/daniel-day-lewis/biography/24?page=7>
33. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2003/feb/28/artsfeatures.daniellaylewis>
34. See Roach, *op. cit.*, 2004, p.564: "Thus a principle of restraint (not doing) informs everything that an actor who possesses the Flower does: "When you feel ten in your heart," Zeami advises, "express seven in your movements"."
35. Barba, Eugenio, *The Floating Islands, Reflections with Odin Teatret*, edited by Ferdinando Taviani, Holstebro, Thomsens Bogtrykkeri, 1979, p. 83.
36. See Schechner, *op. cit.*, p.197: "To be in trance is not to be out of control or unconscious."
37. Panet, Brigid, *Essential Acting, A practical handbook for actors, teachers and directors*, New York, Routledge, 2009, p.3.
38. Read, Alan, *Theatre and Everyday Life, An Ethics of Performance*, USA and Canada, Routledge, 1993, p.17.
39. See Schechner, *op. cit.*, p.91.
40. See Lecoq, Jacques, *ibid*, p. 56, in which Jean-Louis Barrault talks about the importance of breath: "Gesture is breathed or there is no gesture. Just as Claudelian verse is breathed or one doesn't hear it, one doesn't understand it."
41. Euripides, *The Bacchae and Other Plays*, translated by Philip Vellacott, London, Penguin Classics, 1974, Bacchae, v. 924.
42. *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness, and Social Change*, edited by Erika Bourguignon, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973, p.15.
43. See Bourguignon, *ibid.*, Pressel, Esther, p.309.
44. Dodds, E. R., *The Greeks and the irrational*, California, University of California Press, 1951.
45. See Read, *op. cit.*, p.41.
46. See Gerou, Katia, *When the heartbeats change, Discussions on theatre with Ioli Andreadi*, a book on acting, Athens, ed. Kaleidoskopio, 2010. As mentioned in the Acknowledgements, Katia Gerou is a leading actress widely known in Greece for her participation to the Greek Art Theatre, led by the director Karolos Koun who brought a revolution to the 20th century Greek theatre, because of his interpretations of Brecht, Lorca, Williams and the Theatre of the Absurd as well as for his new interpretation of ancient drama.
47. Mathematics has been a source of inspiration for theatre companies such as Complicite. In "A Disappearing Number" they managed to convey the passion of

mathematical research. For example, while the two protagonists were shown working together, musical patterns repeated over and over again, creating a climax that resembled to the frenzy of creativity mathematicians experience in their research work.

48. See Leupin, Alexandre, *Lacan Today: Psychoanalysis, Science, Religion*, New York, The Other Press, 2004.

49. See Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Desmond Lee, London, Penguin Classics, 2003.

50. Barba, Eugenio, Savarese, Nicola, *A dictionary of theatre anthropology: the secret art of the performer*, New York: Routledge, 1991.

51. Bachelard, Gaston, *The psychoanalysis of fire*, translated by Alan C. M. Ross, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964.

52. Hildebeitel, Alf, *The cult of Draupadi, Volume 1, Mythologies: From Gingee to Kuruksetra, Volume 2: On Hindu Ritual and the Goddess*, Chicago/London, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

53. The question of animal sacrifice is certainly a complicated and controversial one. One has, however, to note that according to a very old tradition, see Vernant and collaborators, *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays Grec*, the animal rights are considerably respected by the humans who sacrifice them. The animals have to be treated well and suffer the least possible. On the other hand one has to take into account two factors. Death has to be directly visible in ritual performances such as the Anastenaria. There, the consumption of animal flesh is part of a ritualistic practice; it has to be celebrated, to be given some space and time. Such approach, as it was pointed out by Maria-Lisa Geyer and mentioned in Chapter Six, differs from a casual visit to a supermarket to get some meat, something that Maria-Lisa Geyer, Josh Hoglund, me, and the Anastenarides normally do throughout the rest of the year. Secondly, the narrative of the lyrics of the Anastenaria song concerning the killing and cooking of the boy Constantine by his mother might make us see the animal sacrifice under a different light. Under such light the animal sacrifice might denote, as also in the biblical episode of the substitution of Isaac by a goat, the passage from greater and horrible violence, the infanticide ordered by Yahweh to Abraham, to lesser violence.

54. Coomaraswamy, Ananda Kentish and Subramaniam, Venkateswarier, "The Sacred and the Secular in India's Performing Arts: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Centenary Essays", New Delhi, Ashish Publishers, 1980.

55. Ridout, Nicholas, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

56. Greere Cohn, Robert, *Toward the Poems of Mallarme*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, London, Cambridge University Press, 1965.

57. See Chapter Four that includes the interviews that the participants to the Anastenaria gave me in 2009.

58. Craig, Edward Gordon, "The Ghosts in the Tragedies of Shakespeare", Florence Publication, 1910.
59. Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *History of European Drama and Theatre*, London, Routledge, 2002, p.297.
60. Strasberg, Lee, *A dream of passion, the development of the method*, London: Methuen Drama, 1988, p.182-183 and Minotis, Alexis, *Empeiriki Theatriki Paideia*, Athens, Oi Ekdoseis tw n filwn, 1972.
61. Artaud, Antonin, *Oeuvres Complètes, IV, Le Theatre et son Double: « Le Théâtre et la Peste », « En finir avec les Chefs-d'œuvre », Les Cenci*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964.
62. Schechner, *op. cit.*, p.54.
63. Dali, Salvador, *Oui: The Paranoid Critical Revolution: Writings 1927-1933*, translated by Yvonne Shafir, Boston, Exact Change, 1998.
64. See Gerou, *op. cit.* p.39.
65. Frazer, J. G., *The Golden Bough: A study in Magic and Religion*, Part VI: The Scapegoat, London, Macmillan and Co., 1913.
66. Kott, Jan, *The eating of the gods: an interpretation of Greek tragedy*, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1987.
67. See Schechner, *op. cit.*, p.54.
68. Artaud, Antonin, *Oeuvres Completes, 5. Autour du theatre et son double et des Cenci*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970.
69. The Company of the Living Theatre, "Avignon Statement", *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1969), MIT Press, p. 45.
70. See Panet, *op.cit.*, p.3.
71. See Schechner, *op.cit.*, p.91.
72. See Ridout, *op. cit.* , p.14.
73. See Ridout, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

Chapter Four

1. Taussig, Michael, *Walter Benjamin's Grave*, Chicago and London, 2006, Chicago University Press, p.62.

2. Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Volume 2, Part 1, 1927-1930, "The Great Art of Making Things Seem Closer Together", Cambridge, London, THE BELKNAP PRESS OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, p. 248.
3. Delanty, G. (1997), 'Habermas and Occidental Rationalism: The Politics of Identity, Social Learning, and the Cultural Limits of Moral Universalism'. *Sociological Theory*, 15: 30–59. doi: 10.1111/0735-2751.00022
4. Kawulich, Barbara B., "Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method", *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 6, No 2, 2005.
5. Shepherd, Simon and Wallis, Mick, *Drama/Theatre/Performance*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p.104.
6. Schensul, Stephen L., Schensul, Jean J., Le Compte, Margaret Diane, *Essential Ethnographic Methods: Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaires*, Berkeley, CA, AltaMira Press, 1999, p.91.
7. Bernard, H. R., *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (2nd edition), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, 1994.
8. DeWalt, K. M. and DeWalt, B. R., *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers*, Walnut Creek, CA, AltaMira Press, 2002.
9. Taussig, Michael, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p.126.
10. See endnote 1.
11. Taussig, *op.cit.*, 2006, p.62.
12. Taussig, *ibid.*, p.63.
13. See endnote 2.
14. Benjamin, Walter, *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Volume 1, 1913-1926, "One-Way Street, Lost-And-Found Office", Harvard University Press, 2003, p.468.
15. Conquergood, Dwight, "Performing as a Moral Act, Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance", in *Literature in Performance* Vol. 5.2:1-13, 1985. Also in: *Turning points in qualitative research: Tying knots in handkerchief*, edited by Y.S. Lincoln and N.K. Denzin. London: Alta Mira Press 2003. (Reprinted 2007 in *The community performance reader*, edited by P. Kupperts and G. Robertson. London and New York, Routledge).
16. This necessity for a certain openness/attentiveness became clear to me in a visit in January 2010, between the two visits in May 2009 and May 2010. When I attempted to attend the ritual performance then, other things bothered me. I was not able to find

the *konaki*. I walked for three hours or so in the village, trying to convince myself and everyone I saw in front of me that I was searching for it. I kept receiving opposing directions for it. I kept following them. The *konaki* could not be found. It then got dark. I left with no research outcome. This return in January 2010 did not awaken my memory and it did not produce nearness: unable to remember where it was, I stayed away from the *konaki*. This experience would then make me return to Langadas in May 2010 determined to pay attention to the Anastenaria.

17. See Conquergood, 1985, *op.cit.*.

18. I am making this distinction as other participants, especially the younger ones, are curious about the practices they are enacting too. However, still, the witness's curiosity, which focuses on both the practices and the participants, is of a different kind, in that the point of view and, arguably, the intensity of this curiosity, remains different.

19. *Out in public: reinventing lesbian/gay anthropology in a globalized world*, ed. By Lewin, Ellen and L. Leap, William, New Jersey, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

20. Moeran, 1990, p.340-1 in *Handbook of Ethnography*, ed. By Atkinson, Paul, Coffey, Amanda, Delamont, Sara, Lofland, John, Lofland, Lyn, Los Angeles-London-New Delhi-Singapore-Washington DC, p. 365.

21. Taussig, 2006, *op. cit.*, p.6.

22. Esposito, Roberto, *Communitas, The Origin and Destiny of Community*, transl. by Timothy Campbell, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2010, p.6.

23. Esposito, *ibid*, p.6.

24. Esposito, *ibid*, p.7.

25. Warner, Michael, *Publics and Counterpublics*, Cambridge, Zone Books, 2002, p.2.

26. Esposito, *op. cit.*, p.9.

27. Esposito, *op. cit.*, p.13.

28. Read, Alan, 'Abandoned Practices', Zagreb, Performance Studies International 15, 2009, p.12.

29. Read, Alan, *ibid*, p. 11.

30. See Read, Alan, and his inclusion of non-human objects via Bruno Latour to the discussion on the collective, in *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement, The Last Human Venue*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.195.

31. Esposito, *op. cit.*, p.6

32. Detienne, Marcel, Vernant, Jean-Pierre, *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec; avec les contributions de Jean-Louis Durand, Stella Georgoudi, Francois Hartog et Jesper Svenbro*, Paris, Gallimard, 1979.

33. Eliade, Mircea, *The myth of the eternal return: Cosmos and History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971, p.53.

34. Esposito, *op. cit.*, p.8.

35. Esposito, *op. cit.*, p.8.

36. The case of Haghia Heleni (Saint Helen) in Serres (North East of the country) is different and rather unique for the moment in Greece. The present chief Anastenaris of Haghia Heleni is a man with university studies chosen by his predecessor, Yavassis. However, according to the Anastenarides I interviewed in Langadas (Mina Macheropoulou) he is someone who has not walked on fire. From a formal point of view the tickets in Haghia Heleni are not issued by the Anastenarides but by the “Folklore Society of Haghia Heleni”. It might be interesting to note that on the one hand the chief Anastenaris of that community is an intellectual and on the other hand the institution issuing the tickets is formally composed by people who do not necessarily enact but study the fire ritual. Adaptation to the basic rule of the “market” of spectacle - the ritual becoming something with a market value - is in this case combined with the substitution - at least of the leadership - of initiation/ participation by scientific knowledge.

37. The expression “Western theatre as far as I know it” means here the performances I have been to or the performances I’ve read about, which include but are not limited to shows or texts written about shows that have taken place in Athens, London, Edinburgh, Paris, Moscow and New York and what remains of this knowledge is necessarily one’s own theatrical and textual memories.

38. Kelleher, Joe, “It’s So Beautiful Here. Come, You Come Too, At the postdramatic threshold with Societas Raffaello Sanzio”, *Theater (Yale)*, Vol 13(3), 2007, p.18.

39. We must, however, remember that during the two last decades the use of tickets has been imposed by the leader of the Anastenarides at Saint Helen. His decision may have been dictated not by lucrative motives but because, as theatre practitioners in Greece sometimes argue too, paying a ticket makes the spectator more “respectful”.

40. Danforth, Loring M., “The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* - Volume 2, Number 1, May 1984, p.85.

41. Hourmouziadis, Anastasios, “Περί των Αναστεναρίων και άλλων τινών Εθίμων και Προλήψεων”, (Constantinople, 1873), reprinted in *Αρχαίον του Θρακικού Λαογραφικού και Γλωσσικού Θησαυρού* 26, 1961, p.158.

42. Read, Alan, ‘The Obtuse Angle: On Gentle Gradients Between Literature and Performance’, *Performance Research, ‘Performing Literatures’*, eds. Stephen Bottoms & Richard Gough, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2009, p.131.

43. However, one must not neglect prayer, dance in the konaki, sacrifice, even history and collective memory, however obscure. Or, to put it differently: Would firewalking be the same if deprived of the rest of the components of the ritual performance? One should therefore be cautious of focusing unilaterally on firewalking. One of the aims of Chapter One were to serve as a reminder of this collective memory and history of the ritual.

44. Esposito, *op. cit.*, p.6.

45. See the Virgilian ‘time Danaos et dona ferentes’ as discussed by Esposito, *op. cit.*, p.8. See also Mauss, Marcel, *The Gift, The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, transl. by W. D. Halls, London, Routledge, 1990, on the ambivalence of.

Chapter Five

1. See Benjamin, *op. cit.*, Volume I, p. 468.

2. See Conquergood, 2003, *op. cit.*, p.407-8.

3. Taussig, Michael, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, “Walking through fire”, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p.94.

4. See reference 1.

5. Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka, Aspects of the Popular Thracian Religion of Today*, Athens, G. C. Eleftheroudakis, 1965.

6. Madison, D. Soyini, *Critical Ethnography: method, ethics and performance*, California, Sage Publications, Inc., 2005, p.168.

Chapter Six

1. Conquergood, Dwight, “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance”, *Literature and Performance*, Volume 5, Issue 2, 1985.

2. Girard, Rene, *The violence and the sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory, John Hopkins University, 1977.

3. Esposito, Roberto, *Communitas, The Origin and Destiny of Community*, transl. by Timothy Campbell, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2010, p.6-9.

4. *Out in Public, Reinventing Lesbian/Gay Anthropology in a Globalizing World*, ed. By Lewin, Ellen and L. Leap, William, New Jersey, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
5. Read, Alan, 'The Obtuse Angle: On Gentle Gradients Between Literature and Performance', *Performance Research, 'Performing Literatures'*, eds. Stephen Bottoms & Richard Gough, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2009, p.131: "But no sooner are a number of these abandoned practices abandoned, by which I mean they are not simply forgotten, considered surplus to requirement but are literally banned by an authority, a sovereign power or the EC, their repressed remainder in the form of ceremony and spectacle would appear to appear."
6. See endnote 5.
7. Esposito, Roberto, *op. cit.*, p.12.
8. Esposito, Roberto, *op. cit.*, p.13.
9. Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by S.H. Butcher, New York, Hill and Wang, 1961. Plato, *The Republic*, transl. by Desmond Lee, London, Penguin Books, 1955.
10. Gernet, Luis, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1981.
11. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, translated by James Scully & C John Herington, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975. Aristophanes, *Birds, Lysistrata, Women at the Thesmophoria*, edited and translated by Jeffrey Henderson, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 2000.
12. Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, ed. by R.D. Dawe, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982. Williams, Tennessee, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, London, Penguin Modern Classics, 2009. Williams, Tennessee, *Suddenly, Last Summer*, London, Penguin Modern Classics, 2009. Ibsen, Henrik, *The Ghosts*, a version by Frank Mc Guinness, from a literal translation by Charlotte Barslund, London, Faber and Faber, 2007.
13. Aeschylus and Hughes, Ted, *The Oresteia, A new translation*, London, Faber and Faber, 1999.
14. Euripides, *Euripides, Volume III, Suppliant Women, Electra, Heracles*, translation by David Kovaks, Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1998.
15. Braudel, Fernand, "Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée." In: *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*. 13e année, N. 4, 1958. pp. 725-753.
16. Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by S.H. Butcher, New York, Hill and Wang, 1961.
17. See in Herodotus the Persian captives offered as sacrificial victims to Homestes, the raw-eater, Dionysus.

18. See Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Vintage, 1979. Foucault argues that the performance of power in modern society has changed radically from spectacular capital punishments to undercover capillary penetrations, insinuations, secretions, and circulations of power that is difficult to flesh out. See also Bradley, Paula, *A War on Violence? How Western societies are reacting to terrorism*, InPsych, February 2003.

19. Bradley, Paula, *ibid*.

20. Girard, Rene, *The violence and the sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory, John Hopkins University, 1977.

Chapter Seven

1. Danforth, Loring M., "The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* - Volume 2, Number 1, May 1984, pp. 53-85, p.81; Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka: Ek tis simerinis laikis latrias ton Thrakon*, Athens, 1963; Kakouri, Katerina, *Dionysiaka: Aspects of the Popular Thracian Worship of To-day*, Athens, G.C. Eleftheroudakis, 1965, p.117; Michael-Dede, Maria, "To Anastenari; Psychologiki ke Kinoniologiki Theorisi", "The Anastenari; Psychological and Sociological View", *Thrakika*, no 46, 1972-1973, pp. 23-178; D. Xygalatas, I. Konvalinka, A. Roepstoff and J. Bulbulia 2011. "Quantifying collective effervescence: Heart-rate dynamics at a fire-walking ritual", *Communicative & Integrative Biology* 4 (6); Sansom, Jane, "Firewalking: Explanation and the Mind-Body Relationship", *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Volume 9, Issue 2, 2009, p.195.

2. The claim that the current financial crisis has affected the production of theatrical performance is corroborated when we reflect on recent statistics and arts budget cuts in countries such as Greece, Italy, Portugal and the UK. At the same time, the crisis seems to have affected the theatrical repertory in at least the above countries (see for example Theatre Uncut in 2012 and PIGS at the Royal Court in 2013 in the UK), where artists are trying to creatively address a phenomenon that is affecting their lives as well as the lives of their contemporaries.

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